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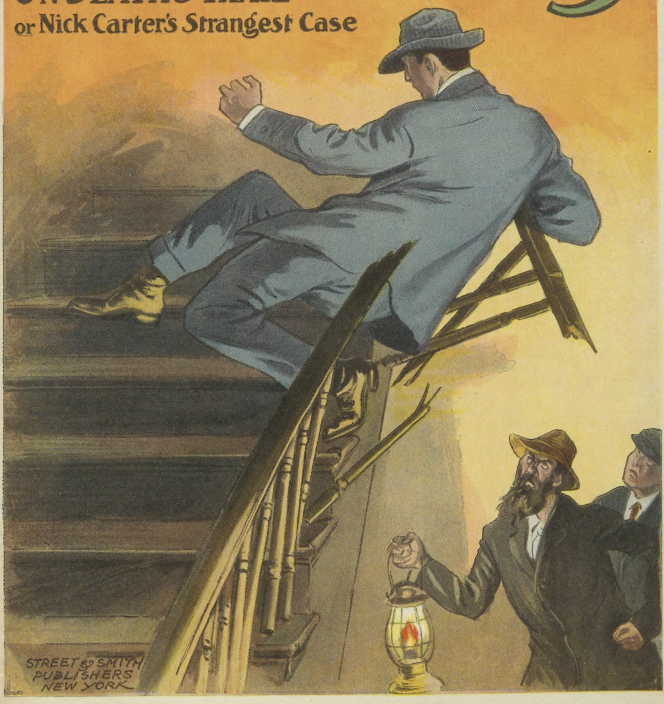
Nick Carter Stories

ON DEATH'S TRAIL
or Nick Carter's Strangest Case



NICK CARTER STORIES

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ON DEATH'S TRAIL;

Or, NICK CARTER'S STRANGEST CASE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

AN OPEN QUESTION.

The solitary ray of light that found its way into the dismal room seemed to shrink from entering.

Silence reigned supreme within.

Outside, even the stillness of the night was hardly broken.

It was a ray of moonlight, as feeble through the misty air as "the glowworm's ineffectual fire."

It found its way in, nevertheless, under one broken slat of a closed blind, and then it seemed to hesitate, losing life and shrinking from going farther.

Was there a lost life within?

The ray of light came farther and fell upon only one object in the room. All else was gloom and silence.

It stood near the partly open window and the closed blinds. It was as motionless as a block of stone, as white as a figure of marble, as cold as a form of clay.

Its covering of white hid it entirely from view, had there been eyes to see. It hung in flimsy folds on either side of the narrow, unpillowed bed. Now and then a breath of the night air stirred it, but only as if in mockery, and an observer would have shrunk and shuddered—lest its motion had been imparted by what it covered.

It was the only sign of life amid the gloom and silence.

Suddenly the stillness was broken, but only faintly. It was as if a bell tolled too soon the funeral knell. In some quarter remote from the dismal room, a clock struck the hour—three slow, mellow strokes of the bell.

Three o'clock in the morning.

Five hours afterward, when the November sun had risen into the heavens and dispelled the night mists that had hung over the slow-winding Potomac and the nation's Capitol, a telephone communication sped from the office of the Washington chief of police to a suite in the Willard, in which three persons then were completing their toilets for breakfast.

One was the celebrated New York detective, Nick Carter, and his two companions were his two chief assistants, Chickering Carter and Patsy Garvan.

"I'll answer it, chief," said Patsy, who happened to be the nearest to the room telephone.

"Go ahead," Nick nodded. "Who can want me at this hour? Harold Garland, perhaps, or Senator Barclay, though I can't imagine for what."

"It's Captain Hadley, the chief of police," said Patsy. "He wants to talk with you."

Nick took the receiver and called:

"Hello! What's wanted, Hadley?"

"That you, Nick?"

"Yes."

"How soon can you leave to meet me?"

"Immediately, Hadley, if necessary."

"Do so, then. Meet me as soon as possible at Herman Fink's undertaking rooms. You know the place. It's where that crook, Andy Margate, who committed suicide when you cornered him last night, was laid out to remain until this morning."

"I know, Hadley, of course," Nick replied. "But what about him?"

"His body is missing."

"Missing!" Nick echoed, amazed.

"Yes. It was stolen in the night. Fink just telephoned me that he cannot find——"

"Enough said, Hadley," Nick interrupted. "We'll see what we can find. I will join you there as soon as possible. I will leave at once."

"Great guns!" Chick exclaimed, after Nick had told him what had occurred. "Margate's body stolen! What's the meaning of that? Are we up against another job in which that miscreant figures?"

"Gee! he'll not cut much of a figure in any kind of a

job," said Patsy. "He was dead as a doornail when he was lugged into Fink's back room. I can swear to that, chief, for I saw him stripped, and saw Doctor Nolan view the body. He's the district coroner and ought to know his business. Say, chief, you don't think that that rat has put anything over on us, do you?"

The last came from Patsy when he noticed the serious expression that had settled on Nick's face.

"I hardly think so, though the bare possibility of it occurred to me," Nick replied, hastening to finish his toilet.

"Holy smoke! it don't seem possible."

"Margate was a crafty dog," Nick added. "He knew more than a wooden Indian. No, I don't think, of course, that he can have fooled us."

"Gee! that would be the last straw. I can't believe it."

"The theft of his body, nevertheless, unless it can be traced and proved to have been disposed of in some way is a serious matter."

"Why so, Nick?"

"Because Margate was a dangerous crook. The disappearance of his remains is a thousand times more serious, in view of all of the possibilities involved, than would be that of an ordinary person. If Margate is still alive, incredible though it seems, he again becomes a dangerous menace to society."

"Very true," Chick admitted. "But, great guns, it seems utterly incredible. The undertaker, or surely the physician, would have detected it. Besides, we saw him keel over, toes up, when he swallowed poison, and——"

"Stop a moment," Nick interrupted. "We don't positively know that it was poison. I'm not dead sure of it, now, in view of what has occurred."

"You suspect that it was only a drug?"

"That is possible."

"Something that instantly caused a condition resembling death, but from which he revived later?"

"Such tricks have been turned."

"But——"

"There is nothing in speculation," Nick again interposed. "We'll defer breakfast until we have looked into the matter. There may be evidence that will definitely settle it."

"Let's hope so."

"You had better both go with me," Nick added. "If the body has, indeed, been stolen, we must find a way to trace it and make absolutely sure that there was no monkey business in the death of Andy Margate. I shall not rest easy while any doubts exist concerning the fate of that designing rascal."

It then was eight o'clock, precisely ten hours since Nick Carter and his assistants had rounded up Margate and his three confederates for the murder of Father Cleary, a Roman Catholic priest, and the abduction of Lottie Trent, the girl employed in the war department who had confided to the priest the details of a plot to blackmail Harold Garland, an engineer in the same department, as well as the father of his fiancée, Senator Barclay, both of whom had previously been seriously involved in the theft of secret fortification plans by Margate and a gang of foreign spies, all of whom had been run down by the three detectives.

Cornered by Nick and his assistants the previous night, one of the crooks had been fatally wounded, two of them arrested, and their ringleader, Margate, had committed suicide by swallowing poison from a vial seized from his pocket.

There had appeared to be no reasonable doubt of it. The district medical examiner who viewed the body pronounced the man dead, and ordered the removal of the corpse to the rooms of an undertaker until morning, it then being too late to have it placed in the city morgue, pending the necessary legal steps in such cases.

Thus it occurred that the corpse of Andy Margate, or the supposed corpse, if Nick Carter's present misgivings were warranted, rested that night in the back room of Herman Fink's undertaking establishment, to which Nick and his assistants repaired as quickly as possible after the astounding telephone communication from Captain Hadley that morning.

The chief had just arrived when Nick entered with Chick and Patsy. They found him in the front office, talking with Herman Fink and Doctor Nolan, the coroner who had viewed the body the previous night, and who was solely responsible for the temporary disposal of it in charge of the undertaker.

The ruddy face of Herman Fink, who was a short, corpulent little German, evinced not only his consternation over what had occurred, but also the fact that he was utterly incapable of having connived in any way at the theft of the notorious crook's remains.

"Ah, here is Carter, now," Captain Hadley exclaimed, when the three detectives entered. "Here's a fine mess, Nick, for fair. I have known live crooks to slip through the fingers of the police, but never a dead one. This is the first case on record."

"We have no precedent, then, to serve us as a guide," Nick replied, smiling a bit grimly. "Is there any question, then, as to the theft of the body?"

Herman Fink threw up his pudgy hands and exclaimed, before Chief Hadley could reply:

"Mein Gott! Vot a question? Not der slightest, Mr. Carter, not der slightest. How can there be any question? Der body is gone, stolen from my pack room, lugged out through der window. Come in and see for yourself. Der plinds——"

"One moment," Nick interposed, detaining him. "I will presently make an investigation. I understand, Doctor Nolan, that you were present when Margate's body was brought here last night."

The physician bowed, looking inexpressibly annoyed over what had occurred and evidently feeling that he was in a measure responsible for it.

"I was here, Mr. Carter," he replied. "I remained until after Fink and his assistant had stripped the body and laid it out. It was nearly one o'clock, mind you, which was the only reason why I deferred sending it to the morgue until this morning. A thought of its being stolen did not enter my mind. I would not have believed it possible."

"In view of what has occurred, can you believe it possible that the man was not dead?" Nick asked, a bit dryly.

"Not dead!" Doctor Nolan echoed, with a look of derision, "No, no, certainly not. That is absurd, Mr. Carter. I know that he was dead."

"You feel absolutely sure of it, eh?"

"I certainly do, sir."

"Did you make any tests to verify your opinion?"

"I did not," Doctor Nolan declared, a bit brusquely.

"No test was necessary. I can tell when a man is dead, Mr. Carter, without resorting to tests."

"Mein gracious!" Fink exclaimed, starting with a sort of ludicrous commiseration at the detective. "Vat an idea! Not tead—vy, vy, Mr. Carter, dot is der vorst I ever heard. I know der man vas tead."

Nick did not resent these positive assertions of both the physician and the undertaker. He knew much better than they, however, to what consummate trickery knaves of Margate's caliber sometimes resort, and he was better informed than either of the ways and means that make it possible.

"I infer, Mr. Fink, that the body was not embalmed, or you would have said so," Nick replied.

"No, sir, it was not," Fink allowed.

"At what time did you leave it laid out in your back room?"

"It vas half past von when I vent up to ped."

"Do you reside over your business establishment?"

"I do, Mr. Carter, mit my family and my assistant, Hans Grost. He came down at half past seven this morning and found der pody vas stolen. He——"

"Who now has the vial, Chief Hadley, from which Margate took the supposed poison?" Nick cut in, turning to the police chief.

"Doctor Nolan has it, I believe."

"I have," bowed the physician. "It is in a safe in my office."

"Does it still contain any of the liquid?"

"A very little, Mr. Carter."

"Do you know of what it consists? Have you examined it?"

"Not yet. I anticipated no such occasion as this."

"Hang on to it, doctor," Nick directed. "A careful chemical analysis may become necessary. Now, Mr. Fink, lead the way to your back room. I'll see what I make of this extraordinary robbery."

CHAPTER II.

A CURIOUS CLEW.

Nick Carter lost no time in seeking evidence that would prove conclusively that Margate's body had really been stolen. He followed Fink through an interior room in which numerous coffins and caskets were displayed in casements of the walls, and adjoining which was the back room in which the body had lain.

It was about twelve feet square. Two windows overlooked a small back yard, from which a narrow alley led out to a side street. The yard was some six feet lower than the avenue on which the building fronted, and below the back room was a basement used for a workroom and storage purposes. A door led from the basement into the yard.

The bare bier stood nearly in the middle of the room.

The blinds of one of the windows was open, the others closed.

A sheet with which the body had been covered was missing.

The garments removed from the corpse the previous night hung on hooks in one of the walls.

Nick quickly took in these features of the scene, and he speedily learned from Fink that both blinds had been closed the night before, that one window was open a few inches, that a door leading to the basement stairs was both locked and bolted, as was true of the lower one leading into the yard. Neither of them appeared to have been opened by the crooks.

"Are these all of the garments removed from the body?" Nick inquired, glancing at them.

"Yes, sir, every piece," Fink declared.

"The remains were covered, you say?"

"Yes, sir; with a sheet, but that is gone," said the undertaker.

"It certainly looks like a genuine case of body snatching," Chick remarked. "Assuming that your misgivings are warranted, Nick, and that Margate tricked us with a drug and afterward revived, he surely would have put on his clothing before departing. He would not have left here unclad, or wrapped only in the missing sheet."

"Drug be hanged!" Doctor Nolan said derisively. "That's nonsense. That theory hasn't feet to stand on."

"It does seem highly improbable," added Chief Hadley, gravely shaking his head. "I see no reasonable grounds for such a suspicion. It appears dead open and shut that the corpse was stolen."

"We must, then, find positive evidence of it," Nick replied. "The crooks must have left their tracks. It won't do to remain in any uncertainty concerning the death of Margate. This matter must be positively settled."

"Settled!" Doctor Nolan scornfully blurted. "It already is settled. There's no question about it."

Nick Carter did not reply. He saw nothing to be gained by an argument in support of his seemingly absurd suspicions.

Taking a powerful lens from his pocket, Nick fell to inspecting the floor, the sill of the open window, and the outside of the faded green blinds.

On the floor near the bier were particles of dry dirt, as if tracked in on soiled shoes. The dust on the stone outside of the window had recently been disturbed, while that on the slats of the blinds plainly showed the marks of fingers, evidently thrust between them in order to pull open the blinds.

Glancing down into the unpaved yard, Nick then discovered two quite deep holes in the damp ground, some three feet from the wall and directly opposite the window. He called Chick's attention to them, remarking quietly:

"There was a short ladder set up against this window."

"I see. Surely."

"The indications are, indeed, that Margate was really dead and that his body was stolen. Either that, Chick, or he had confederates who removed and afterward revived him."

"But how could they have learned that he was brought here?" Chick questioned doubtfully. "It was nearly midnight when we rounded him up, and he was brought directly here from the building in which we cornered him. Who could have learned about it, and how, between half past one and daylight, to say nothing of having framed up and pulled off such a job?"

"That remains to be learned," Nick replied. "Nor will that alone be sufficient. His body must be traced and found. Go down with me to the yard. We'll have a look in the alley."

Fink led the way and unlocked the doors.

"All of you except Chick remain in the basement," Nick directed, when the others followed him down the stairs. "If there are any footprints to be found outside,

or evidence of any kind, I don't want them obliterated. They may prove to be of value."

"Ah!" Doctor Nolan exclaimed. "I take it, Mr. Carter, that you are coming to my way of thinking."

"There is evidence in support of your belief," Nick frankly admitted, disregarding the tinge of sarcasm with which the physician had spoken.

"I thought you would find it."

"I may find something more, perhaps, before I end my work in this case."

Nick's voice took on a more subtle ring when he replied, stepping out into the yard with his chief assistant.

There in the damp earth they found numerous hardly discernible footprints, most of them near the two holes Nick had observed from the window, or leading toward a gate opening into the alley. All of them were so intermingled and partly effaced, however, that they were of little value. After carefully inspecting them, nevertheless, Nick said quietly:

"Three men have been here. I think that was the number, judging from these faint imprints. One of them held a short ladder while the others entered that window. They brought out the body, whether dead or alive, and got away with it."

"You still suspect trickery on Margate's part?" questioned Chick.

"I do," said Nick. "I believe there is something more than a coincidence in the theft of this man's body so soon after his supposed suicide. We must go deeper, however, before I can form a more definite opinion. Let's have a look in the alley."

Nick found the gate unbolted and called Chick's attention to it.

"They did not delay to fasten it," he remarked. "Ah, here is something of more significance! The body was taken away in a box."

"By Jove, that's as true as death and taxes," Chick agreed, after following Nick through the gate. "It also indicates, at least, that the persons who stole the body supposed Margate to be dead."

"It does appear so."

The earth in the alley was more damp than in the yard, and was of a grayish clay that readily retained an imprint.

That which at once had caught Nick's eye was that of a long box, such as caskets are inclosed in for burial. It had been placed on the ground, into which it had sunk just enough to leave a perfectly definite impression of its outlines, presumably when a heavy body was placed in it.

Through the alley leading to the side street, moreover, were numerous footprints; but these were so intermingled and partly obliterated, like those in the yard, as to be of no great value.

Crouching upon the ground, however, Nick made a discovery that would have escaped the observation of most men. It was hardly perceptible, but the keen eyes of the famous detective seldom missed anything out of the ordinary.

"By Jove, here's a remarkable clew," said he, suddenly looking up. "I remember none like it."

"What do you mean?"

"Look closer."

Nick pointed to the rectangular surface contained within the plainly discernible outlines of the box.

"By gracious! there are some more faint marks on the damp clay," said Chick, bending nearer.

"Exactly," Nick nodded.

"What do you make of them?"

"That side of the box that came next to the ground was marked with the ordinary ink and brush such as shippers use. There probably was an address marked on the box."

"And transferred to the clay?"

"Precisely. The damp clay moistened the ink and has retained parts of some of the more heavily marked letters, chiefly the capital letters."

"I see."

"They are faint and much blurred, however, as well as reversed in position; but—yes, I am right. Here are two at the end of an address marked on the box."

"They look like two small letters, a 'g' and an 'e,'" said Chick, twisting so as to view them better.

"That's correct," said Nick, using his lens. "They are the final letters of the word college. Here is the loop of one 'l, also the larger curve of the capital 'C.'"

"By Jove, that's very significant," said Chick. "This may have been the crime of medical students who wanted a body for dissection."

"I begin to think so."

"Can you determine any of the other letters?"

"Only three capitals," said Nick, still scrutinizing the blurred marks with his lens. "There appears to be two quite long words preceding the word 'college'."

"That immediately preceding it begins with 'M.' It may be medical." Chick quickly suggested.

"I am quite sure of that."

"What are the others?"

"There seems to be two words preceding that, or one very long one," said Nick. "They are so blurred that I cannot read them. The first capital in the address, however, is a 'D.'"

"It evidently is the name of a medical college."

"I think so."

"The location is not legible?"

"No. Only a capital 'S,' evidently that of the word 'street.' No numerals are discernible."

"The box must originally have contained something that was shipped to a local medical college," said Chick. "With the initial to aid us, and the fact that it is in one of the city streets, not an avenue, the directory should enable us to identify it."

"We will see after going a step farther," replied Nick, rising and replacing his lens in his pocket. "I wish to inspect this side street."

He led the way while speaking, and paused on the curbing of the sidewalk. The street was a narrow, unpaved one, flanked on both sides with inferior stores with dwelling apartments above, a street that was only dimly lighted after the early hours of the evening.

The ground was somewhat muddy from recent rain, and near the curbing were plainly discernible the tracks of a wagon and the footprints of the horses attached to it.

"A team stopped here last night," said Nick, pointing. "There was a fourth man in the gang."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because here are four tracks of tires close to the curbing. There would be only two, those of the front and rear wheels, if there had been only one stop made."

"That's true."

"I am sure there were three men who took the body from the back room," Nick added. "No less could have accomplished it without being heard. They would not have dared to leave their team standing here all the while. The fourth man drove away and returned to get his confederates and their burden. That's why we find four tracks here, instead of only two."

"Surely," Chick agreed. "There's no getting around it."

"The wagon had rubber tires, moreover, and—yes, by Jove, one of them was patched, or mended. Here are the marks left in two places by a seam, or where some new rubber was vulcanized to the old. This will help some, I think."

"We can bank on that, Nick, all right."

"Say nothing about this to others," Nick directed. "We will follow up these clews and see to what they lead, Chick, before making any disclosures."

"That's good judgment."

"Come. We'll return to the shop."

As they retraced their steps through the alley, Nick obliterated the evidence found there, treading out the imprint of the box with his boots.

"Well, what have you learned?" Chief Hadley asked, when the two detectives entered and rejoined the group in the basement. "You have been gone long enough to have discovered something."

"Enough to further confirm Doctor Nolan's opinion," Nick replied, a bit dryly. "The body was taken away by four men who came in a wagon."

"Ah!" Doctor Nolan exclaimed. "I was reasonably sure of it."

"There is no other evidence worthy of mention," Nick added. "It may be well, chief, to have an officer inquire at the dwellings in the side street. The crooks possibly were heard, or even seen, without the truth being suspected."

"I will attend to it," Hadley nodded, while they returned to the office of the undertaker.

"There is nothing more to be learned here," said Nick. "I will look deeper into the case, however, and will report to you later."

"Do so, Nick, by all means."

"Regarding that vial, Doctor Nolan, I want you to let Chick take it for a few hours," Nick added, turning to the physician. "I want an analysis of its contents, or the nature of it to be positively determined. I will be responsible for its safe return."

"That's good enough for me, Carter," Doctor Nolan readily assented.

"Chick will call at your office for it later in the day."

"Very well."

Nick did not defer his departure to further discuss the matter. He left Chief Hadley and the coroner to proceed as they saw fit, and Herman Fink in quite abject consternation over the gruesome calamity that had befallen him.

"We now will hunt up a directory," Nick remarked, walking up the street with Chick and Patsy. "I decided not to consult the one in Fink's office."

"It would have led Hadley to suspect that we are wise to something," smiled Chick.

"Surely."

"What have you picked up?" questioned Patsy, surprised.

Chick informed him, ending just as they arrived at a corner drug store, into which Nick led the way.

A city directory supplied him with the information he was seeking.

"Here we have it," said he, while Chick and Patsy eagerly read the address to which he pointed. "The Dabney Private Medical College."

"By Jove, there is no question about it," Chick declared.

"Private—that was the word that bothered me," Nick added. "The first two words looked like a single exceedingly long one. This certainly does settle it. Come on. We'll not wait for breakfast. We'll find out what's doing in this Dabney Private Medical College. There shall be nothing too private for us to butt into, Chick, take my word for that."

CHAPTER III.

THE EMPTY BOX.

Gifted with more than ordinary intuition, as well as a remarkably keen perception resulting from years of trained experience, Nick Carter already felt sure that the case engaging him had features that did not yet appear on the surface, and that it might prove to be one of the strangest cases on record.

It still was comparatively early, only nine o'clock, when Nick arrived with Chick and Patsy in the neighborhood of the Dabney Private Medical College.

From a policeman whom he met and whose beat was in that locality, Nick learned that the institution was a small one, having usually only about twenty students, and that it was conducted solely by one Doctor David Dabney, a physician of good reputation, recognized ability, and a man of considerable means.

The last was manifest in the locality and appearance of the place presently viewed from a near distance by the detectives. It occupied a corner estate of considerable size, containing an attractive stone residence and a near building of brick, to which an annex evidently had been added, and beyond which were a stable and garage, the driveway to which was entered from a side street. All were of a superior type, while the well-kept grounds were adorned with numerous shade trees, the branches of some of which mingled with those in the rear of a fine estate forming on a fashionable avenue.

The latter struck Nick as being somewhat familiar, but seeing only the rear of the handsome wooden residence, which was almost hidden by the intervening trees, and not having approached by the way of the avenue, he did not then recall when he had previously seen it, or who dwelt there.

In view of what the policeman had told him, and which the appearance of the Dabney place seemed to confirm, Nick quickly decided how he would proceed.

"If the physician is all that the officer stated, he would not countenance the theft of a corpse, even that of a crook, and the job must have been secretly done by some of his students, assuming that we are in right," said Nick, after sizing up the place.

"That now seems reasonable," Chick agreed.

"Gee, we ought to be able to cinch it!" said Patsy. "The wagon and box must be here, as well as the body, even though that may have been concealed. We ought to be able to find them."

"We'll find them, Patsy, if they are there," Nick re-

plied. "I'll enter and have a talk with Dabney. You two saunter around to the side street from which the driveway leads to the stable and garage. Keep your eyes open and hold up any one who attempts to leave while I am getting in my work. I think I can drive the game from cover."

"Go ahead," Chick nodded. "We'll follow in a few moments."

Nick moved on, and presently entered a walk leading to the physician's residence. A man came out of a side door at the same moment and started to cross the grounds toward the brick building mentioned. Upon seeing Nick, however, he turned and approached him.

He was a tall, spare man of about sixty, with smooth-shaved and rather angular features, a prominent nose, deep-set eyes, and a high brow. He was clad in a black suit with a long frock coat, which accentuated the height of his somewhat attenuated figure. He bowed when the detective drew nearer, saying, with an agreeable voice:

"Good morning, sir."

Nick returned the greeting, then added:

"I am looking for Doctor Dabney."

"You need look no farther," smiled the physician. "I am Doctor Dabney. What can I do for you? Will you walk into the house?"

"I think not," Nick replied, knowing that what he sought would not be found in the house. "My name is Ryder. I have a nephew who wishes to become a physician, and I am thinking of sending him here for tuition, if agreeable to you."

Doctor Dabney brightened perceptibly.

"It will be decidedly agreeable, Mr. Ryder," he said, extending his hand to shake that of the detective. "I am always glad to add to the list of my students. How old is your nephew?"

"He has just turned twenty."

"A very good age at which to begin a course of medical study. Do you reside in Washington?"

Nick replied that he did not, and he then proceeded to make a few consistent inquiries as to terms and accommodations for students, and he wound up with remarking:

"If you can spare the time, Doctor Dabney, or will have some one conduct me, I would like to inspect your college building and its various departments. I infer that you have no objection."

"Quite the contrary," Doctor Dabney said quickly. "I will be more than pleased to show you around. I am to give a lecture in the dissecting room in half an hour, but I shall have ample time to accompany you."

"The dissecting room—that is one place I would specially like to visit," said Nick, with manifest interest.

"We can conveniently begin with that, for it is in the annex," said Doctor Dabney, pointing toward the rear of the brick building. "Come with me. Some of my students are beginning to arrive, you see. They are the ones whose homes are in or near the city. I at present have only twenty students who are quartered in the college, though we have accommodations for twice that number."

Nick had already observed that several young men were entering from the side street, while others were gathered near a door leading into the annex. He was quick to detect, moreover, that a group of three in front of the garage and stable were betraying a much more serious interest in him while he approached with the physician. They were talking earnestly and viewing him with a furtive, apprehensive scrutiny which, with their noticeable paleness, at once convinced him that they were the culprits he was seeking.

Nick evinced no special interest in them, however, but remarked to the physician, following up the topic under discussion:

"I suppose you find it difficult at times to obtain subjects for dissection?"

Doctor Dabney heard him without a change of countenance.

"Well, yes, at times," he admitted. "They can be obtained only through the proper authorities and by paying a fixed price. That is to say, of course, unless one resorts to felonious methods to get them," he added, smiling significantly. "But I would not sanction anything of that kind."

"I suppose not."

"No, not for a moment," Doctor Dabney declared.

Nick believed him. He saw plainly enough that the physician was not only a man of character, but also that he had too much at stake to have connived at such a crime as had been committed the previous night.

They had been following a driveway passing the garage and stable. In the latter a hostler was washing a covered wagon, and Nick glanced in and noted that the wheels had rubber tires.

A few more steps brought them to the annex of the brick building. A door leading into a broad corridor with a cement floor was wide open.

Instead of immediately entering, however, Doctor Dabney turned to another door some twelve feet to the right, remarking, while he opened it:

"Speaking of subjects for dissection, Mr. Ryder, I will begin with showing you where they are kept until wanted. The door in the rear leads directly into the dissecting room, where I give many of my lectures."

Nick peered into the cold basement room which the physician disclosed. It was lighted with only a single narrow window, high in one of the walls. The door in the rear wall was closed.

On a low stone shelf at one side a covered figure was lying, gruesome in its suggestiveness, but the size of which at once convinced Nick that it could not be the body of Andy Margate.

Near the opposite wall, nevertheless, and equally convincing to the detective, stood a long, narrow box, somewhat faded and defaced, which Nick saw at a glance was about the size of the imprint found in the alley back of Fink's undertaking rooms.

"It's not a very agreeable sight, Mr. Ryder, but I thought you might wish to omit nothing in connection with my establishment," said Doctor Dabney, in apologetic tones.

"Quite right," Nick replied. "Do you mind if I step in?"

"Certainly not," said the physician, with a look of surprise.

"Such things do not affect me seriously," Nick added. "The room appears well adapted to what is required of it. May I ask, Doctor Dabney, what this box contains?"

Nick touched it with his foot.

"Nothing whatever. It is empty."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Sure of it—certainly," exclaimed the physician. "It was put here only temporarily. It contained the casement in which a skeleton was recently shipped to me from

New York. The skeleton has been removed and is now in the dissecting room."

Nick turned and regarded him more sharply.

"Would you be surprised, Doctor Dabney, if I were to tell you that the box now contains a corpse?" he inquired.

"Surprised would hardly express it," Doctor Dabney replied, with a shrug. "I would not call you a liar, of course, but I would say that you never were more mistaken in your life."

"Nevertheless, doctor, you're the one who would be mistaken," said Nick pointedly.

"Nonsense! You don't mean——"

"I mean just what I say, Doctor Dabney. This box now contains a corpse."

"Absurd! How could——"

"Wait a moment," Nick again interrupted. "Let's see whether I am right. It is a matter that can be easily and quickly settled. See for yourself, Doctor Dabney."

Nick had previously noticed that the screws had been removed from the cover of the box, though it still remained in position. He bent over while speaking and seized one side of it, then tipped it over on the floor.

No cry of amazement came from the physician.

The detective was the one who drew back with surprise.

Quite naturally, of course, Doctor Dabney now began to suspect some ulterior motive for the detective's conduct. He straightened up with a frown, saying a bit brusquely:

"This is no place for a jest, Mr. Ryder, as you should know without being told. If you are not what you pretend, and have any reason for thinking that this box contained a body, I beg to inform you——"

"One moment, doctor, if you please," Nick interposed. "I will presently explain to your entire satisfaction."

Nick turned over the box while he was speaking. He found on the lower side a blurred black address printed with a shipper's marking brush. The wood still was damp and soiled with grayish clay, moreover, which alone would have convinced him that he had made no mistake.

Nick did not immediately explain to the physician, however, who stood watching him with a darker frown on his thin face. He saw that about a dozen of the students had gathered in the driveway near by, all of them men in the twenties, and among them the three whom he had seen talking so earnestly near the stable.

Nick stepped out and approached the group, apparently with no aggressive intentions, until, turning abruptly to one of the three, he said sternly:

"Well, what have you done with it?"

The man addressed was about twenty-five, and quite a powerful fellow, set up like an athlete, with dark features and somewhat sinister eyes.

"Done with what?" he demanded. "You appear to be addressing me."

"That's right," Nick nodded. "I am addressing you and your two companions, and your faces alone warrant what I am saying. What have you done with it?"

"I don't know what you mean," snapped the other. "If you think——"

"Stop one moment," Nick sternly interrupted. "I know, young man, which is much more than to merely think. You three men, with a fourth to aid you, stole a corpse last night from the back room of Herman Fink, the undertaker. You used the rubber-tired wagon in yonder stable. You stopped in the side street, entered through an alley, and, with a short ladder, you took the body through the undertaker's back window. You put it in that box, which you already had placed in the alley, and afterward brought it here."

"I guess not," cried the same man defiantly. "You're talking through your hat, Mr.——"

"Carter is my name—Nick Carter," the detective again cut in. "You may have heard of me. Whether you have, or not, is immaterial. I can prove all that I have said, and only the truth, if you chose to make a clean breast of the whole business, will save you fellows from—ah, here is additional evidence, if that were needed. It appears that your confederate, the fourth man, was about to bolt."

Nick had caught sight of Chick and Patsy approaching from the side street, each grasping the arm of a tall, pale young man, who appeared to be on the verge of fainting.

CHAPTER IV.

MARKED IN DUST.

The mention of Nick Carter's name, following close upon his positive accusations, produced an immediate change in the attitude of the three recreant medical students. Defiance vanished like a flash from the face of the one who had been talking, and whom Nick now suspected of being the leader in the crime of the previous night.

Another was trembling visibly, while the third impulsively blurted, as if impelled by the detective's advice:

"There's nothing to it, Oakley, but to confess the whole business. Neither bluff nor bluster will cut any ice against Nick Carter. Good heavens! what possessed me to do such a thing?"

"That's not the question," said Oakley, a bit sullenly. "You now have confessed the whole business, barring the outcome. Only the devil himself can explain that. The question is—what became of the body?"

Nick Carter heard the last with no great surprise. It was in line with his earlier suspicions. He saw, too, with what consternation Doctor Dabney and the other students began to realize what had been done the night before, and he checked with a gesture the censure that was rising to the lips of the astounded physician.

"You hold your horses, Doctor Dabney, and let me handle the ribbons," he said impressively. "The reputation of your college is at stake, and I am much better able to save it than you, providing the remorse of these young men is genuine and they follow my advice. The good name of your institution should not be ruined by the foolishness of a few of your students, if it can possibly be prevented. I think they now will see it in the same light and do all in their power to rectify their folly. What do you say, Mr. Oakley?"

Oakley threw up his hands and met the detective better than halfway.

"I say that you're all wool and a yard wide, Mr. Carter," he cried, with genuine feeling. "I'll speak for the others and tell you the whole story. Not only that, sir, but we'll do all we can to repair the wrong."

"Spoken like a man," Nick replied. "I learned long ago that a manly man can be brought out flat-footed

with proper handling. What is the whole story, Mr. Oakley?"

"It can be told with a breath, Mr. Carter, and I'll hand it to you straight," said Oakley. "We were out late last night, I and these three companions, and we drank a bit more than we should have done. When wine goes in, wisdom and discretion go out, sir, and that was the beginning of it."

"Continue, Mr. Oakley," said Nick.

"Well, sir, we came to Fink's place along about one o'clock, and we saw that a corpse had been taken in there. We learned from a chap who had overheard the facts, that it was the corpse of a notorious criminal, and that it was to remain in Fink's place till this morning, instead of being sent to the morgue."

"That was correct."

"Well, sir, in the heat of wine, I suggested to my companions that we ought to have that criminal's brain for examination, in the interests of medical science and the possible benefit to society. It was a mad suggestion, but not too mad for my companions. We were just right to do what, if in our sober senses, we would not have done for the world."

"In brief, Mr. Oakley, you went there and stole the body," said Nick.

"That's just what we did, sir, and precisely as you have stated," Oakley admitted. "We came here and quietly got out the wagon, also a short ladder with which to reach the undertaker's back window, which we had located before going away. We brought the body here about four o'clock this morning. We did not dare to leave it in the box, however, which we had taken from the room you have just inspected. We replaced the box in the room, but hid the body in the basement under the dissecting room."

"It then was about four o'clock?"

"Yes, sir."

"Continue."

"We already had begun to realize, of course, the gravity of the crime we had committed," Oakley proceeded. "We went to my apartments in the street below, but not to go to bed, for we were much too nervous to sleep. We held a long discussion of the matter and the situation in which we had placed ourselves, and we finally determined to replace the corpse in the wagon and to return it to Fink's place, making a frank confession of our guilt and relying upon his mercy. But we found, upon returning to the basement, that we could not do so."

"Could not, Mr. Oakley?"

"No, sir," cried Oakley, with augmented feeling. "It was impossible for us to do so. Imagine our surprise, our consternation, our utterly inexpressible dismay."

"You mean——"

"I mean, sir, that the body was gone."

"That's true, Mr. Carter," groaned another of the culprits. "Every word of it is true as gospel. The corpse had vanished as if the earth had swallowed it. We searched in vain. Good heavens, what a mess! I thought, sir, I was going daffy."

Nick Carter was less surprised than the other hearers. He had begun to suspect what had really occurred and how it was possible. He paused to briefly consider the matter from every standpoint, aiming to act for the best, while Doctor David Dabney relieved his pent-up feelings in terms that would read even worse than they sounded, and while the half score of students who had gathered near by stared in mute amazement over the bewildering affair.

Nick presently took the ribbons again, however, saying with an impressiveness that never failed to prove effective:

"There is nothing in harsh words, Doctor Dabney, at this stage of the game. We must meet the situation in the best way and attempt to remedy it without too much publicity. I am not going to arrest these young men at present, nor later if it can be avoided."

"Good for you, sir," cried Oakley gratefully.

"I shall bind them on their honor to remain here, as usual, and these other students, as well as yourself, to say nothing about this matter," Nick added. "Upon your silence and theirs may depend the effect of all this upon your institution. I happen to know all about the criminal whose body seems to have disappeared so mysteriously, and the recovery of which is of much more importance to me, as well as to the community, than the immediate censure and punishment of these four students. You must do what I have directed, therefore, while I shall take immediate steps to trace the missing body."

Nick's consideration and advice had the effect he anticipated. Doctor Dabney subdued his anger and eagerly seized the opportunity to avoid publicity. The relief of the four culprits was beyond description, and one and all who were present pledged themselves to strictly follow the detective's instructions.

Thus the matter was adjusted temporarily, at least, and Nick then turned to Oakley and said:

"Conduct me to the basement, now, and show me where you left the body. In the meantime, Doctor Dabney, that there may appear to be nothing unusual going on here, have all of your other students attend the lecture you had planned to deliver. There is, in fact, no occasion to postpone it. I will undertake with my two assistants to do all that the case now requires. Lead the way, Oakley, that no time may be lost."

The last was said with a significant glance at Chick and Patsy, and the three detectives followed Oakley toward the basement door, while Doctor Dabney and the gathering students trooped toward the entrance to the annex in accord with Nick Carter's instructions.

"I happen to have a key that will open this door, Mr. Carter, or we must have found some other hiding place for the body," Oakley explained, while unlocking the basement door. "How it was discovered and removed by others—well, sir, that beats me to a frazzle. I was literally knocked stiff when I found it missing."

"Had you detected any sign of life, Oakley, while handling it?" Nick inquired. "I infer, of course, that you had not."

"Not the slightest, Mr. Carter," said Oakley, with a look of surprise. "You surely do not suspect——"

"Never mind what I suspect," Nick interrupted, while descending to the basement. "Show me just where you placed the body."

Oakley led the way to a corner back of some coal bins and pointed to the floor.

"We left it there, sir," he said simply.

"With a covering over it?"

"Yes, sir; the sheet brought from Fink's place."

"Nothing else?"

"No, sir."

"Did you lock the door after going out with your companions?"

"That was not necessary," Oakley explained. "It has an automatic spring lock, like many of the doors in this building, which can be opened from within, though a key is required by one entering from outside. They were equipped with locks of that kind because students frequently are the last to leave the building, and it obviated providing keys for all."

"I see," Nick remarked. "One can leave this basement without a key, then?"

"Yes, sir; easily."

Nick took out his electric searchlight and began a close inspection of the cement floor. It was covered with a thin, almost imperceptible layer of dust, mingled with which were particles of coal dust, quite plainly visible with the aid of a powerful lens.

"You have given it to me straight, Oakley, all right," Nick remarked, after a moment, looking up. "My lens shows where the dust has been disturbed, and I can determine part of the outline of the body. There appears to have been considerable moving about, however, either by——"

"Surely not by the body!" Oakley exclaimed, staring.

"Don't be so sure of that," Nick said dryly. "Things aren't always what they seem. We may find that—ah, I find it even sooner than I expected. Here is one—yes, a second and third. This tells the story."

"What is it?" cried Oakley impulsively.

"Have a look, Chick," said Nick. "Use my lens."

Chick hastened to comply, viewing one of several faint bits of evidence on the dusty floor.

"What is it?" Oakley repeated, quivering with excitement.

Chick looked up and replied:

"It's a faint print in the dust—the print of a naked foot."

CHAPTER V.

WHERE THE TRAIL LED.

"Subdue your surprise. This is no more than I was expecting to find," said Nick Carter, glancing at Oakley's amazed face. "I have picked up a trail which I felt sure I must seek, sooner or later, and to find where it leads now is of paramount importance."

"Gee! that's right, chief, for fair," said Patsy. "This mah hunt now opens in earnest."

"I shall need you no longer, Oakley," Nick added. "You had better join the other students at the lecture. I will do what I can to pull you fellows out of this scrape, but much will depend upon what already has been published, and upon my success in finding the missing man. No, no, don't demur over going, nor stop to thank me. Time now is of double value. Go at once."

Oakley appeared anxious to remain to follow farther the detective's investigations, but the expression in Nick's eyes warned him against objecting, and he turned with a nod and a mere word of thanks and hurried from the basement.

"By Jove, this is a most extraordinary case," Chick then said, a bit grimly. "Have you now any doubt, Nick, that Margate still is alive?"

"Not the slightest," Nick replied. "I have felt from the first that that was the case."

"But how could he have accomplished——"

"Oh, the circumstances admit of only one explanation," Nick interposed. "Margate had, when we cornered him, some kind of a drug or compound which, when swallowed, instantly produced a physical condition so closely resembling death that it deceived not only us, but also Doctor Nolan and the undertaker."

"It did, indeed."

"The condition, which was probably a form of catalepsy, evidently lasts a definite number of hours, depending in a measure upon the health and strength of the subject, and concerning which Margate must have been perfectly informed."

"Surely."

"He took the one chance that, if supposed to be dead, he would throw off the effects of the drug and revive at such a time and in such surroundings as would permit of immediate flight."

"The drug evidently ceased to be effective between four o'clock and daylight."

"Undoubtedly," said Nick. "That would have served him admirably if he had remained in Fink's back room. He could have arisen and quietly dressed himself, his garments having been left in the room, and he could easily have made his escape."

"Sure, chief," put in Patsy. "Like turning over in bed."

"The job done by the students, however, put him in bad," Nick added. "He must have revived in this basement, in a building in which he probably could not obtain a rag of clothing, aside from the sheet with which he was covered. Immediate flight, however, was imperative. He luckily had the advantage of darkness, and he probably fled at once, wrapped only in the sheet. His first move, of course, was to find garments by some hook or crook and in some near quarter, and I think we can learn where he got them."

"He did not break into Dabney's house, nor the rooms of any of the students, or the fact would have been reported," said Chick.

"He would have been less likely to do that, Chick, than to have sought some near residence occupied by fewer persons and presenting less danger of detection and arrest."

"That's true."

"I will try with Patsy to follow up the trail," said Nick, turning to the door. "You go to Doctor Nolan's office in the meantime and get the vial still containing some of the drug, or compound, used by Margate. Take it to Professor George Arden, whose address you will find in the directory. He is one of the leading chemists in the country, and he probably will be able to tell us of what the stuff consists."

"Most likely," Chick agreed. "Where will I see you later?"

"At the Willard. We will return about noon for lunch."

"Very good. I'll be there," Chick nodded, turning to go.

They had emerged from the basement while speaking, and Nick and Patsy now began seeking the trail of the missing man. Neither in the driveway, nor on the surrounding lawns, could they discover any sign of a bare footprint, however, and Nick paused after a few moments and said:

"We must use our heads and determine what direc-

tion he naturally would have taken. He would not have ventured to the lighted streets. He would have known he might be seen and arrested."

"That would have been very probable, chief, for fair," said Patsy.

"He may have crossed the rear grounds, therefore, and perhaps saw that house which fronts on the avenue. The roof could have been seen above the trees, even in the darkness."

"That's right, too."

"We'll go that way, Patsy, and see what we can learn. Keep your eyes open for footprints."

"Bet you!" said Patsy sententiously.

It took them only a few minutes to cross the Dabney grounds, when they brought up at a low wall flanking the rear of the estate Nick had noticed when he first arrived in that locality. It now struck him even more familiarly, though he never had seen the rear grounds, nor that side of the imposing wooden residence.

"Come on," he said, leaping over the wall. "The direct course, if Margate had his head and really came this way, would have been around the garage and across the side lawn."

"Sure, chief, if he was heading for the house," said Patsy.

"A dwelling is where he most likely would have sought clothing," Nick replied. "A knave as desperate as he and as sorely in need of garments would not have shrunk from breaking in and——"

"Gee! half a minute, chief," Patsy now cried, interrupting. "Yes, I'm right. Here's the print of a bare foot."

Patsy had discovered it in some loose earth near the garage and hastened to inspect it. There was no mistaking it, for it was distinctly outlined in the damp soil, and it showed plainly in which direction the man was going.

"He was heading for the house, chief, just as you have suspected," Patsy added, turning to look for another.

"I was sure he would seek some dwelling," Nick replied. "Which one was the only question. It naturally would be the one most safely and quickly approached, and that was why I came this way. We'll inquire whether anything has been stolen, or—hello! some one is calling my name. By Jove, it's Senator Barclay. That explains it. I thought I recognized this place, though I have called here only twice."

"Gee! he's some excited, chief," said Patsy. "I guess you have hit the nail on the head, all right."

Senator Barclay, who had emerged from a side door of the house, had been hurrying toward them while they were speaking. He was hatless and wore a loose velvet smoking jacket, and he looked pale and excited, indeed, in the morning sunlight.

"I saw you from the library window, Nick," he cried, upon drawing nearer. "What brought you here? I've been trying vainly to get you by telephone. I was told that you left the Willard before breakfast."

"So I did," Nick replied, shaking hands with him. "I was called out on a rather curious case. But what do you want of me, Senator Barclay, and why are you so disturbed?" he added tentatively.

"I have cause to be disturbed, most serious cause," Senator Barclay answered, with an effort to govern his feelings. "I will tell you of that a little later. My house has been robbed—a most amazing robbery."

"Why amazing, senator?"

"Judge for yourself. Every piece of my clothing removed when I went to bed last night, was carried away by the thief. Shoes, stockings, underwear, shirt, and outside garments—not a piece was left behind by the rascal. Why he took such articles is more than I can fathom. Why he——"

"One moment," Nick interposed, with a furtive glance at Patsy. "Did he take anything else of value?"

"I should say he did," Senator Barclay cried impetuously. "My pocketbook containing several hundred dollars, my diamond pin worth nearly a thousand, my watch and chain—all of them went with the garments."

"H'm, I see."

"Not content with them, moreover, the rascal robbed the sleeping room of my daughter Estella, and got away with considerable money and a quantity of costly jewelry, which unfortunately had not been put in the library safe."

"Your loss will aggregate, then——"

"Ten thousand dollars, at least, as far as the plunder goes. But that is nothing, absolutely nothing, Nick, compared with the loss of one other article," Senator Barclay said, with a groan.

"One other article?" Nick echoed, gazing at his white face. "What is that?"

"I cannot tell you—not here," was the reply. "I must talk with you privately. Come to the house. Stella is nearly prostrated, but she does not dream of my distress and anxiety. I have hidden the truth from her, even, and can confide only in you, Nick. For you are the one man on whom I can depend, who may be able to successfully meet the situation. Come to the house. I then will inform you."

"Very well," Nick consented. "I understand, now, why you were so anxious to reach me."

"I was more than anxious, more than anxious," Senator Barclay repeated, while Nick and Patsy accompanied him toward the house. "There is another mysterious feature in connection with this robbery, Nick; one that seems utterly inexplicable."

"What is that?" Nick inquired.

"The thief, or thieves, as the case may be, left a soiled sheet in the butler's pantry, which they entered by breaking the window and unlocking it. The pantry is so shut in that the noise was not heard. The robbery was not discovered until Estella awoke early this morning and found that her room had been entered. Why the burglars had a soiled sheet, which looks as if it had been through a war, puzzled me even more than——"

"It does not puzzle me, Senator Barclay," Nick interposed.

"No?"

The statesman gazed at Nick with a look of amazement.

"Not at all," Nick added. "There was only one burglar, senator, and I happen to know why he had a soiled sheet."

"Good heavens! is it possible?" Senator Barclay replied, with countenance beginning to brighten. "There are hundreds of brilliant and discerning men in the circle of my acquaintance, Carter, but you certainly have something on all of them. What do you mean? How do you know there was only one burglar, and why he left a soiled sheet in my house? By gracious, I begin to feel that you may yet avert the calamity that threatens me."

"Let's wait until we are seated in our library, senator," Nick replied, smiling. "I then will answer your

questions and learn what you require of me. It goes without saying, of course, that I will do all in my power to avert any calamity that threatens you."

CHAPTER VI.

A THREATENING SITUATION.

Nick Carter did not visit the butler's pantry to examine the broken window, nor did he care to inspect the soiled sheet left there by Andy Margate, who had provided for him with unexpected outside help one of the strangest cases in the career of the celebrated detective.

Nick already had formed a correct theory in regard to the burglary. He now wanted to learn only what gave Senator Barclay so much more anxiety and distress than his pecuniary loss.

Nick accompanied him into the library, therefore, leaving Patsy to wait in the reception room, and he began with informing the statesman of the circumstances which, beyond any reasonable doubt, explained the crime committed in his residence early that morning.

"Good heavens!" Senator Barclay exclaimed, after hearing Nick's statements. "Are we never to be rid of this man Margate? I never heard of such a case. If he——"

"Never mind him, Senator Barclay," Nick interposed. "I will put him away for keeps sooner or later."

"Well, well, I hope so."

"Tell me without delay, for time may be valuable, how you are threatened with something more serious than the loss of your money and jewels."

"It is infinitely more serious, Carter, for it not only involves a matter of international importance, but also the reputation, welfare, and social standing of a very prominent and very beautiful woman," said Senator Barclay, in tones tremulous again with profound feeling.

"How so?" Nick inquired. "Was something else stolen?"

"Yes. In the pocket of the coat stolen by Margate was a document confided to me temporarily by the woman in question."

"Ah, I see."

"With it in the pocket, moreover, was a letter written to me by the woman when she sent me the document for inspection," Senator Barclay continued. "I received it only early last evening. I was to have returned it this morning. It was most important that I should have done so. The gravity of the situation, Carter, can hardly be imagined."

"Because of the nature of the document?" Nick questioned.

"That is one reason," was the reply. "The document relates to a secret compact between several European powers and in a measure has a bearing upon their relations with this country."

"I see," Nick nodded.

"It bears the signatures of no less than five foreign ambassadors now in Washington, all of whom are pledged to secrecy in regard to the matter. None would believe for a moment that this compact is even suspected by any American statesman or diplomat, and much less that the existence of the document mentioned is positively known."

"I follow you."

"The discovery of the fact might precipitate complications of a very grave and threatening nature," Senator Barclay added. "I can safely assert, however, that I am the only American who, with one exception, knows anything about the document—aside from the knave into whose hands it has fallen."

"Let me know the exact facts," said Nick. "Who is the one exception who knows about the document?"

"The woman I have mentioned."

"How did you learn about it?"

"The woman informed me."

"How did she become informed?"

Senator Barclay hesitated for a moment, gazing intently at the earnest face of the famous detective.

"I am going to confide in you, Nick, as I would in no other man on earth," he said impressively. "The woman whose name I will presently mention is the wife of one of the European ambassadors whose signatures are on the document. He is without exception the most influential and illustrious diplomat now in this country."

"You must refer, then, to Sir Edward Deland."

"Yes."

"I have met him," said Nick. "He was married here only a year ago. His wife, who is many years younger than he, was a wealthy American girl."

"From which," said Senator Barclay; "has evolved the terrible situation in which we now are placed."

"You and Lady Deland?"

"Yes."

"Explain," said Nick. "I don't quite get you."

Senator Barclay proceeded to do so. Drawing forward in his chair, he said, even more gravely:

"Something like ten days ago, Nick, for no other reason than that I had apprehended something of the kind, I began to suspect the frame-up of the secret compact mentioned, and that a document to that effect already existed. Naturally, of course, I knew that Sir Edward Deland would be one of the chief figures in it."

"Quite likely, of course," bowed Nick.

"I had occasion three days ago to visit the Deland residence in company with my daughter, who long has been an intimate friend of Lady Deland. I found an opportunity to hint to the latter that she perhaps knew something of the matter I had on my mind, and that it would become a true-blue American girl to confidentially inform me of anything that might possibly be a menace to our country."

"I see," Nick remarked, suppressing an inclination to criticize. "What did she say to that?"

"Somewhat to my surprise, though I have always been very friendly with Lady Deland and her parents, a fact which perhaps led me to make such a suggestion to her—somewhat to my surprise, I repeat, she immediately admitted that such a compact had been made, that she had overheard her husband discussing it with other diplomats, and that the document bearing upon the matter then was in the library safe."

"What followed?"

"Lady Deland hastened to add that the compact, of the nature of which she was partly informed, was in no sense a menace to this country," Senator Barclay continued. "I told her I could not believe that, and that she really must be mistaken. We discussed the matter very earnestly for some time, and she then declared, with much feeling, that the very best service she could do me and her country would be to let me read the document, in order to convince me of my error and so avert the troubles that might otherwise result from it."

"That was hardly loyal to her husband," said Nick.

"Lady Deland did not so regard it," replied Senator Barclay. "She argued that she could not serve him better than to dispel my suspicions and set him right in my opinion. Bear in mind that she has known me from childhood, with absolute confidence in me. She would have no greater faith in her own father."

"I can appreciate that, senator, as far as it goes."

"I do not feel that it was quite right to sanction her suggestion," Senator Barclay allowed. "I knew, in fact, that it was quite wrong. I reasoned, on the other hand, however, that it would be of vast relief and advantage to me to positively verify her assertions. The temptation was one I really could not resist."

"You allowed her to show you the document?" said Nick inquiringly.

"Not at that time," Senator Barclay replied. "It then was impossible for her to have done so secretly. Sir Edward Deland was at home, talking with my daughter and another lady in the conservatory."

"And you alone with Lady Deland, of course, during your discussion."

"Yes, on the side veranda."

"What did you decide to do?"

"Lady Deland decided for me. She said that Sir Edward was going to New York yesterday morning for two or three days, also that she knew the combination of the safe and in what compartment the document had been placed."

"H'm, I see."

"She said she would send it to me yesterday evening, which she did, with an understanding that I would surely return it to her this morning. That now is impossible, utterly impossible," Senator Barclay added, with increasing agitation. "Unless I soon can do so, however—good heavens, Carter, think of the position in which we are placed. Unless the document can be recovered and returned to the safe before Sir Edward Deland arrives home——"

"There is no need to picture the situation," Nick interposed. "It is about as bad as it could be, senator, for you and Lady Deland."

"Bad doesn't express it," groaned the statesman. "It is horrible—horrible!"

"I will do all in my power to pull you out of the affair," Nick assured him. "Tell me, now, whether the document is of the nature you had feared. Is this secret compact in any way a menace to this country?"

"No, thank God, it is not," Senator Barclay said fervently. "I am relieved to that extent, at least."

"All that really is involved in the lost document, then, is the exposure that threatens you and Lady Deland."

"Is that not enough?"

"Quite enough, Senator Barclay, and then some," Nick admitted. "You said, I think, that she sent you a letter with the document."

"Yes."

"By mail?"

"No, indeed. Both were brought here by her butler, Hawley, who was entirely ignorant of what the package contained."

"What did she say in the letter?"

"Only a few lines, directing me to take the utmost care of the document, and reminding me of the terrible consequences in event of its loss."

"That would be quite enough for any knavish person into whose hands it might fall," Nick said, with grim dryness. "I know of no person who would be more quick to take advantage of it than Andy Margate. Did Lady Deland sign her full name to the letter?"

"She did."

"Have you communicated with her this morning?"

"Not yet," groaned Senator Barclay, nervously wringing his hands. "I have been trying to get hold of you. How can I tell her? How can I inform her, Carter, that——"

"You're not going to inform her, Senator Barclay. You must keep perfectly quiet and leave this matter to me. It now is eleven o'clock. I will see Lady Deland as quickly as possible. Write me a letter of introduction, senator, and I'll be off at once."

"But what do you intend——"

"Don't ask me what I intend doing," Nick interrupted. "I don't know myself, at present, save that I must see Lady Deland without needless delay."

Senator Barclay hastened to write the desired note, saying while he gave it to the detective:

"Do you really mean, Nick, that I must do nothing more in this matter?"

"Absolutely nothing until you have heard from me," Nick said impressively. "I now know positively that Andy Margate lives, and I'm out to get him. In getting him, Senator Barclay, I shall probably get the letter and document that are of such vast importance to you. Whether it can be done in time to avert the peril that threatens you and Lady Deland remains to be seen. It certainly cannot be accomplished by prolonging this discussion. I must hasten to see Lady Deland."

CHAPTER VII.

SUSPICIONS VERIFIED.

Chick Carter, following the instructions Nick had given him, readily obtained from Doctor Nolan the vial from which Andy Margate had swallowed most of the supposed poison with which he was thought to have committed suicide when cornered by the detectives, yet which evidently had resulted in the extraordinary case brought to Nick's notice early the following morning, and the true inwardness of which he had been so quick to suspect.

To prove it, however, despite the surrounding circumstances, and to locate and corner Margate again, to say nothing of doing so in time to save the reputations of Senator Barclay and the impulsive American girl who had put herself in a position that threatened to ruin the remaining years of her life—all this was an entirely different proposition.

The discernment of Nick Carter, nevertheless, as well as the wisdom of the course he had shaped, appeared in part in the visit of Chick Carter to the laboratory of the eminent Washington chemist, and in what immediately followed his departure.

It was nearly noon when Chick introduced himself to Professor Arden and stated his mission. He met with a cordial reception, and the chemist soon began an examination of the small quantity of fluid still remaining in the vial.

Chick waited in an adjoining room for more than an hour. Most of this time was passed in reading a magazine found on the table. Ending an article in which he

had become interested, Chick replaced the book on the table and glanced incidentially through one of the screened windows overlooking the grounds without and an adjoining side street.

A man who was passing at that moment caught the detective's eye, and his sinister appearance and somewhat stealthy movements quickly aroused Chick's suspicions.

He was a slender, cheaply clad fellow in the twenties, wearing a baggy brown suit and a woolen cap, the latter pulled suggestively low over his brow. He peered from under it while passing a boxwood hedge flanking one side of the grounds, and once he paused nearly back of a clump of shrubbery to gaze intently toward the laboratory windows, though the wire screen prevented any view of the interior.

"By Jove, he is sizing up this place," thought Chick, after intently watching the fellow. "What's his motive? If it corresponds with his looks, by gracious, it's sinister enough. What motive can he have in which I do not figure, since he appears to have turned up since I arrived here? If I'm right, and I'd stake a trifle on it, that fellow is a rat that needs watching."

The man had moved on, crossing the side street and turning an opposite corner. He scarce had turned it, however, when Chick, still watching, saw his bullet-shaped head thrust cautiously around the corner building. It was obvious, too, that his ratty eyes were directed toward the taxicab in front of the chemist's residence, that in which Chick had come there and for whom the chauffeur was waiting.

Presently the head vanished—but not the detective's suspicions.

When Professor Arden rejoined Chick a few moments later, he returned the nearly empty vial, saying, with a smile:

"I have retained enough of the fluid to make a thorough analysis, or tests that may possibly reveal its precise nature and properties. I was inclined to doubt, Mr. Carter, the existence of any substance or compound that would have upon the human organism just such effects as you have described in the case of Margate."

"Nevertheless, professor, Nick feels very sure he is right," said Chick.

"I now think he may be," replied the chemist. "I have been experimenting with a guinea pig, using a minute quantity of the fluid, and the effect upon the animal is very similar. He fell almost instantly into a rigid state and appeared to be dead."

"That was precisely the case with Margate."

"While I was applying other tests to a drop of the fluid, however, which required most of the time I have been absent, the animal began to revive."

"So soon probably because of the small quantity of fluid used," Chick suggested.

"I think so," Professor Arden agreed. "I am more inclined, now, to credit your suspicions concerning Margate. I cannot definitely determine the ingredients of the fluid at this time, however, and I may not be able to do so at all. I will try later, nevertheless, and will advise you by letter."

"I will give you Nick's home address," said Chick, producing a card. "It's mighty strange and powerful stuff, all right, whatever it is."

"You may have heard, no doubt, of the poisons of Exili," Professor Arden replied. "He was a notorious criminal of the seventeenth century, who knew the art of making the most subtle and deadly poisons, as well as compounds which are said to have had very similar effects upon persons as those you have described. Some of the formulas of Exili are said to have been handed down through generations to the present day, moreover, the secret and sinister possessions of a very few persons. It is not impossible that was the source of this fluid used by Margate."

"I am well informed concerning Exili and his poisons," said Chick, smiling a bit grimly. "We had a very extraordinary and sensational case about three years ago, in which one of the Exili poisons figured. There was no doubt about it in that case. You may be right as to this stuff."

"You shall hear from me later about it," said Professor Arden, while he accepted his fee and accompanied the detective to the door.

Chick thanked him again and departed. The man in a baggy brown suit had not reappeared, but Chick still had him in mind. He walked briskly out to the taxicab, then paused briefly and said to the chauffeur:

"Has any man spoken to you while waiting?"

"No, sir."

"Follow my instructions," Chick directed, apprehending that he might be covertly watched. "Drive straight down this avenue and turn the first corner to the left. After having turned it to a point out of view from here, stop at once and drop me. Then drive on quickly and go about your business. Understand?"

"Sure. That don't take a very long head."

Chick sprang into the taxicab, and without looking back he was whirled speedily around the corner, a block from the chemist's residence. He then sprang out—and the chauffeur uttered an exclamation of surprise.

He did not recognize his passenger.

Chick had put on a disguise and knocked his soft felt hat into an entirely different shape.

"Drive on," he commanded, giving the chauffeur a bank note. "Move lively and forget the quick change."

"Bet you!" grinned the driver, speeding away.

Chick returned to the corner and peered cautiously around it.

The man in baggy brown was just descending the steps of Professor Arden's residence.

"Aha! That does settle it," thought Chick. "He wanted to know who had called on the chemist, and he went to inquire, probably offering some plausible reason. He evidently found out, too, judging from the celerity with which he is departing. You shall also find, young man, that there are longer heads than yours."

The seedy young man then was hastening down the avenue in Chick's direction, but on the opposite side of the broad thoroughfare.

Chick stepped into the side entrance of a near store and watched him from one of the front windows.

The suspect stopped short on the opposite corner and gazed sharply in the direction the taxicab had taken. It then had disappeared. The street was deserted, with the exception of a solitary nurse girl wheeling a baby in a carriage. The man pushed the cap from over his brow and hurried on.

Chick left the store a moment later and followed him.

His quarry turned the next corner east and soon brought up at a trolley line running out of the city. At a stand near by he bought two newspapers, and then waited on the corner for a car.

Chick noticed in which direction he was looking for it to approach, which told him in which direction the man intended going. He then crossed the avenue, mingling with other pedestrians, and waited on the next corner beyond his quarry. Five minutes later he saw the man board an open car, taking one of the front seats, and Chick presently seated himself on a rear one.

The suspect then was absorbed in one of his newspapers. More than half an hour had passed, when, looking up, he quickly folded it and thrust it into his pocket.

The car then had left the outskirts of the city far behind. It was passing through a rural country, quite thickly wooded in sections, and Chick could see in the near distance a road diverging at a slight angle to the right from that of the trolley line.

"He's going to drop off at that road," he said to himself. "It's favorable for me, all right, in that the woods and shrubbery will afford me some shelter."

Chick had rightly interpreted the man's movements, for the latter presently signaled the conductor and alighted from the car at the juncture of two roads, at once walking briskly up that to the right.

Chick rode on about thirty yards, then sprang from the moving car and stepped quickly toward the scrubby trees and shrubbery filling the apex of the angle formed by the two roads. Flanking the opposite side of that which the car was following, scattered dwellings could be seen in the distance, but the road to the right appeared to be unsettled.

Somewhat to Chick's surprise, after stealing in among the low trees to a point enabling him to see the latter road, he discovered his quarry seated on a rock at one side and gazing up the deserted way.

"He has an appointment with some one," Chick reasoned, noting the man's expectant expression. "He is going to wait, and it's up to me to do the same, also to crawl near enough to overhear what may be said. That ought to be easily accomplished, if I can avoid snapping a twig."

The suspect had unfolded his second newspaper and was beginning to read it.

Chick dropped upon his hands and knees and, crept within thirty feet of the man, then settled himself in a thicket that effectively concealed him, though through the twigs and foliage he could plainly see the waiting man.

He could see, too, that he was much amused by what he was reading, and Chick was not slow in suspecting the nature of it.

Twenty minutes passed, also several motor cars, at each of which the suspect gazed sharply when he heard it approaching. He sprang up at length, hearing and seeing another, and Chick felt a thrill of satisfaction when an inferior, two-seated runabout containing a man and a woman came to a stop near his quarry.

"All three cannot ride away in that trap," he said to himself. "I can keep an eye on one of them, at least."

Even before a word came from one of them, moreover, confirming his immediate suspicions, Chick had sized up the couple in the car.

The woman was somewhat showily clad, about thirty years old, and quite attractive, barring her rouged cheeks and indications of dissipation in her sharp gray eyes.

Her companion was a bearded man in an ill-fitting black suit with a frock coat, and with a gray slouch hat on his head. The instant Chick saw him and his garments, he was sure of the man's identity, despite his facial disguise.

"Margate himself!" flashed up in his mind. "Andy Margate, as sure as I'm a foot high."

This was confirmed almost immediately by the intercourse that began as soon as the woman, who was driving the runabout, brought it to a stop at one side of the road.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "You're here ahead of us, Tony."

"Sure I'm here," said the man in baggy brown. "I've been waiting twenty minutes."

"Well, what have you learned, Selig?" Margate demanded, with manifest interest. "You keep quiet, Nance, and let me do the talking."

"Tony Selig," thought Chick; then, he rightly inferred: "By their resemblance, too, this woman should be his sister. Nance Selig, eh?"

The man in the road drew nearer the car, replying, with a laugh:

"Oh, I have not been idle, Andy, you can bet on that. You're in right in one way, but wrong in another."

"Wrong, eh?" queried Margate, with a snarl. "Tell me the worst first. Wrong in what way?"

"Nick Carter suspects you have fooled him."

"The deuce he does!"

"But he only suspects, mind you," Tony Selig quickly added. "He isn't sure of it."

"How do you know? How did you learn that?"

"After watching the Deland woman's house until nearly noon, as you directed, and seeing no one show up, I started out here to report. As I was passing the residence of Professor Arden, the chemist, I saw a taxicab waiting in front of it. I suspected right off the reel that a detective on your case might be there. You know for what, Andy, and I was right."

"How did you make sure of it?"

"I watched until a man came out and hurried away in the taxi," Selig explained, with a sly grin. "I reckoned from your description that he was Chick Carter. I made sure of it by ringing Arden to his door and asking him if Mr. Carter had been there. He was a fall guy, Andy, all right. He said that Mr. Carter had just left there."

"Humph!" Margate ejaculated, scowling. "That did settle it. I feared that the Carters were on to the case."

"But they only suspect," Tony Selig repeated. "They are sure of nothing, Andy, nor any of the guns, except that the stiff was stolen. There is no clew to the thieves, nor any doubt of its having been a genuine stiff, as you can see from this newspaper story. Have a look. Here's the latest edition."

Margate seized the newspaper and eagerly read the story mentioned. It told only of the theft of the supposed corpse from Fink's back room, of the ignorance of the police and detectives concerning the identity of the perpetrators of the outrage, and of the deep mystery enshrouding the entire gruesome case.

Margate read it aloud for the benefit of Nancy Selig, and Chick heard every word of it, as well as all of what passed between the three crooks.

"Nick was right, by Jove, in saying nothing about

our discoveries in the alley," he said to himself. "This rascal now will think, indeed, that we are all in the dark."

This already was apparent in the look of relief that had arisen to Margate's bearded face. He banged the newspaper with his fist, uttering an oath and exultantly adding:

"You're right, Selig, dead right. The infernal dicks know nothing definite. They believe I was dead, they surely believe it, and know only that my body was stolen. They have no idea who stole it, however, not even a shadow of suspicion, or the reporters would have got wise to it."

"Surest thing you know, Andy," Selig nodded.

"It's a safe gamble, too, that the cursed students who queered my game will keep their traps closed," Margate forcibly argued. "They'll not dare to confess. Even though mystified by its disappearance, they'll think themselves well rid of the body. It's a cinch that the Carters have not tracked them, nor more than suspect the truth, and we still have time to bleed the woman out of a big wad of money."

"That's true, Andy, if we waste no time," put in Nance Selig suggestively.

"Right you are, Nance," declared Margate, with eyes glowing.

"Get a move on, then."

"We'll get the coin. We'll drive her to the wall. Home with you, Tony, and wait till I return. I'll be gone only long enough to put Nance in right. She can turn the trick before evening. In the meantime, Tony, we'll make ready to receive her ladyship—and her boodle. Home with you, Tony, and wait till I show up."

The runabout, guided by the woman, was moving rapidly away before the last was said, shouted over his shoulder by the daring and designing criminal.

Chick Carter had more than one reason for lying low and letting the rascal go.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHICK CARTER'S MISHAP.

Knowing nothing about the discoveries made by Nick Carter since parting from him at the medical college, ignorant as to the identity of the woman mentioned by Margate, but knowing at least that the rascal was engaged in another felonious scheme, said to reach its culmination that very evening, and that he might accomplish even more by following Tony Selig than by attempting to arrest the three crooks then and there, which might have been difficult when undertaken single-handed—these were Chick Carter's reasons for letting Margate and the woman depart, and for resuming his pursuit of Tony Selig.

The latter immediately started up the road in the direction from which Margate had come, and his actions plainly denoted that he had no thought of being followed.

Chick found it comparatively easy, therefore, to shadow him without being detected. He followed him for nearly a mile through the woodland road, passing only a solitary house on the way, despite that the road appeared to be one that was frequently traveled by motorists.

Twenty minutes brought Tony Selig to his destination. It proved to be an old wooden house back from the road, with a stable and outbuildings in the rear, all in a clearing dotted with numerous hencoops and countless hens and chickens, which denoted from what the occupants of the inferior place derived their living, perhaps in connection with other and more profitable ventures.

Chick stole to a point in the surrounding woods from which he could view the place. He saw two men and a large, rawboned woman emerge from the back door, toward which Tony had turned his steps, and all four then sat down on a platform outside and began an earnest discussion of the news Tony Selig evidently had brought them.

Chick rightly inferred that they were all of one family, but he was too far away to hear what passed between them during the next hour. He continued to watch them until four o'clock, however, when Margate returned alone in the runabout. All sprang up to greet him, to which he put a speedy end by saying, so forcibly that Chick heard him distinctly:

"Cut that out for something more important. I've set the ball rolling, and Nance knows just what to do. It's up to us to do the rest. Get the lanterns, Zeke, you and Angus, and we'll head for the Poplars. It will be dark in an hour, or a trifle more. The game might show up even earlier. We must be ready for her. I'll get the documents, but we'll leave the other plunder here. Be ready when I come out."

Margate hurried into the house with the last, not waiting for an answer.

The two men addressed by name, evidently the father and brother of Tony Selig, hastened to the stable, from which they quickly emerged with three oil lanterns. They then returned to the house, from which the woman had in the meantime brought their coats and hats.

"By Jove, this does look like something doing," thought Chick, stealing into a thicket some fifty yards back of the house. "The Poplars, eh? I wonder where that is, or they, if it refers only to trees. I'll come pretty near finding out, by gracious, also to what documents that rascal refers. I wonder which way they'll head."

Chick had not long to wait, and it was not without misgivings that he saw the four men shape a course through the woods that took them within twenty feet of his concealment.

They passed without seeing him, however, and he then proceeded to cautiously keep them in view.

A tramp of half a mile through the woods brought into view another section of the road, also a large, old wooden house some fifty yards from the highway, with a stable and a long, open shed adjoining it, the whole shut in somewhat by a park of huge, old silver-leaf poplars, from which the house evidently derived its name.

Chick saw at a glance, nevertheless, that the house was unoccupied. The curtains or blinds of most of the windows were closely drawn. The stable doors were closed and padlocked, while the ground in the driveway and shed was running to rank grass.

The character of the place also was apparent, and it afterward appeared that it had been closed by the authorities nearly a year before, and since had been unoccupied.

"An old road house," thought Chick, sizing it up. "It has been vacant for some time. But why have these rascals come here? Why is he taking a chance of breaking into the house? By Jove, I think I have it."

Margate, leading the way, was skillfully forcing open the back door of the deserted old road house.

"They want the expected interview in a house with which they are not identified, yet in which it can be safely held," Chick rightly reasoned. "This isolated old place just serves them, and they feel sure of not being traced from it. I reckon that won't be necessary, by Jove, if I can get in my work without a hitch."

Margate had led the way into the house, followed by his three confederates.

Chick could see that they had left the door ajar, however, and it was obvious that not one of them feared having been watched, for not a curtain stirred at any of the windows, denoting the precaution of stealthily looking out.

"I'll wait a few minutes and then take a chance," Chick muttered. "I can slip in there unheard. I'll wager I can thwart any knavery they have up their sleeves. It's only twenty yards from the end of the open shed to that side of the house. It would be child's play to reach the back door from that place."

The sun had set and the dusk of the November afternoon was beginning to gather.

Chick looked around for another dwelling, or signs of persons traveling the road, but none met his searching gaze. He felt that he must tackle the task single-handed, and that a step taken at that time might be of later advantage.

Not a sound came from within the house, nor a sign of the men who had entered it.

Starting abruptly when the dusk began to deepen, Chick crept back of the long shed, quickly picking his way to that end of it nearest the house. He then waited and listened briefly, and he could hear the intermittent blows of a hammer.

"That does settle it," he said to himself. "They evidently are busy, so here's my chance."

Darting quickly to the back steps, Chick crouched and listened again, still hearing the hammer, and he then pushed the door open a few inches. The dim hall was deserted. It ran straight through the house to the front door.

Chick now could hear the four men in one of the side rooms. He stepped noiselessly into the hall, leaving the door as he had found it, and he then sought concealment on a bare back stairway leading to the second floor.

"I may find it of advantage to steal up there," he said to himself. "I must overhear just what comes off in this crib, and also learn how many I am finally up against."

The hammer ceased at that moment, and he heard Margate say gruffly, addressing the elder Selig:

"That's good enough, Zeke. Good enough."

"It strikes me so, Andy."

"Sure. Not a ray of light can get through the blankets, to say nothing of the curtains and blinds. We'll be safe enough from detection."

"They have been tacking blankets over the windows," thought Chick.

"Light the lanterns, Angus," Margate now commanded. "It's getting infernally dark here, but not as dark as I found it last night, nor anything like as cold. That was a close call, if ever a man had one."

"Close call is right, Andy," Tony Selig vouchsafed.

"But the meds did me a good turn, at that," Margate added. "They forced me into seeking other garments than my own, and put me in a way to pull off this job. We'll clean up handsomely from the whole business, you can bank on that, and there'll be no clew left to show who turned the trick, after I have bolted with Nance for South America."

"You'll be bolted in other quarters, you rascal, unless I am much mistaken," thought Chick, still on the stairway. "By Jove, I don't quite fathom this business."

The conversation that followed shed a ray of light upon it, but only a ray, as far as the listening detective was concerned.

"You feel sure the woman will pay, do you?" Zeke Selig inquired.

"Pay—you bet she'll pay," said Margate confidently. "Her letter to Barclay shows that. What else can she do? She's got to have the document before her husband shows up, or—well, she knows what the finish would be."

"When will he show up?"

"The letter don't say. It says only that she must have the document to-day. I would nail Barclay, too, only he's likely to call on Nick Carter for aid after informing the woman of his loss. I'll take a chance that we can bleed her before Carter gets to work there. Just now, you know, he must have his hands full looking after my body."

"But what in thunder is the document?" asked Tony, after lighting the lanterns.

"I cannot just make it out," replied Margate. "It's a foreign agreement of some kind and is signed by a bunch of diplomats."

"H'm, I see," thought Chick, listening intently. "Senator Barclay evidently is in wrong with some woman."

"I know enough, however, to be sure we could nail no one else for anything," Margate added. "The woman is the only one in our clutches, since the trick must be turned immediately. She'll come across with the coin, all right, and may show up here with Nance at any moment. I'll fix the front door so we can let her in. By the way, one of you lock and bolt the back door."

Both Zeke and Angus Selig started to do so, striding out of the room at Margate's heels, and all three appeared almost immediately in the hall, then lighted by the rays from the lanterns.

Chick heard them coming and knew that he must be seen if he remained on the stairway, about half of which he had ascended. He drew back quickly from the plain wooden rail on the outer side, intending to steal quietly up to the second floor.

When he trod on the next bare stair, however, the projecting edge of the footboard, weakened with age and dampness in the closed house, broke under his weight.

Chick lost his footing and his balance.

He fell heavily against the rail, seizing it to prevent falling backward down the stairs.

The startling noise brought a roar from Margate:

"What's that?"

The question was instantly answered—but not verbally.

The stairway rail snapped and broke under the detective's weight.

Instead of falling backward down the stairway, Chick pitched headlong over the side of it, straight down six feet to the hall floor, on which he landed with a crash that seemed to shake the house.

The three men saw him as plainly as they had heard him, and another roar came from Andy Margate.

"A spy! One of the Carters, boys, or I'm a liar. Get him! Lend me a hand."

Chick heard them, though severely shaken and stunned, and he tried to rise.

Margate leaped upon him like a wolf on a lamb, however, forcing him back upon the floor and dealing him a blow on the head, at the same time shouting:

"Out with a gun! Shoot him, Zeke, if he stirs. Bring a rope, Tony, and be quick about it. Cut one of the window cords."

CHAPTER IX.

THE WOMAN INVOLVED.

It was close upon noon when Nick Carter, after his interview with Senator Barclay, rejoined Patsy Garvan and hastened from the statesman's residence. None could have appreciated more keenly the gravity of the situation, the delicate nature of what had been confided to him, and the quick and clever work that must be done to avert the impending calamity, if indeed it were possible.

Nick thought he already saw his way clearly, however, and he began with informing Patsy of as many of the circumstances as the case required.

"We've got a look in, Patsy, at least," he added, pausing on a corner to hail a taxicab. "If Margate sizes up the letter and document as I think he will, he may undertake to blackmail Lady Deland before I can be seen by Senator Barclay and put on the case. He will reason, of course, that I cannot have yet discovered that he is alive, much less have tracked him to the medical college and to the Barclay residence."

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Patsy. "You're the only man on earth, chief, who could have accomplished all that in so short a time. Margate will not believe it possible."

"I am banking on that, Patsy, and that he will attempt to take advantage of my supposed ignorance. He will know, too, that any move to blackmail Lady Deland must be made immediately, both on my account and the fact that the document must be restored to her before to-morrow, when it will become useless as a lever to blackmail her."

"I see both points, chief," nodded Patsy.

"I have a countermove framed up in my mind," Nick added.

"What's that, chief?"

"I will inform you a little later. You go to the Willard as quickly as possible, now, and bring our make-up box to the Deland residence, wearing a disguise. I have one in my pocket that will enable me to go there without being recognized, assuming that the house is being watched, which I hardly think is probable. We'll take no chances, however. Rejoin me there as soon as possible."

"You can bank on that, chief," declared Patsy, as he turned and hurried away.

Ten minutes later, and precisely ten minutes after Tony Selig ceased watching the Deland residence, Nick alighted in the disguise of an elderly man from his taxicab and rang the doorbell of the imposing stone mansion. The summons was answered by the butler, Hawley, to whom Nick said tentatively:

"Is Sir Edward Deland at home?"

"No, sir," Hawley politely informed him. "He is in New York to-day. He is expected here to-morrow."

"Lady Deland, then?"

"She is at home, sir. I will take in your card, sir, if——"

"Take this note to her, instead, and say that I would like to see her immediately," Nick directed, interrupting.

"Walk in, sir."

Nick had waited only a few moments in the reception hall, when the butler returned and conducted him to the library, where he found Lady Deland awaiting him—a stately, beautiful woman still in the twenties, whose pale cheeks and apprehensive eyes denoted with what misgivings she had read Senator Barclay's note introducing the famous detective.

"Close the door when you go out," she directed, with a glance at the butler.

"Yes, your ladyship."

Hawley bowed himself from the room.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Carter, and long have known you by name," said Lady Deland, then shaking hands with the detective. "Tell me—what is the meaning of this visit? Has anything happened to Sir Edward Deland, or to——"

She hesitated, turning deathly white when Nick, removing his disguise, said gravely:

"You have anticipated what has happened, Lady Deland."

"You know?" she gasped.

"Senator Barclay was forced to confide in me."

"Oh, my God!"

The woman reeled as if about to faint, and Nick helped her to a chair, saying quickly:

"Do not be alarmed. Nothing confided to me, Lady Deland, ever goes farther. I know all of the circumstances and appreciate your position. I hope to accomplish all that is necessary to set you right. I really expect to do so, in fact, so try to be calm and give me your assistance. Both are imperative to what I have in view."

Nick's encouraging words were not without effect upon her. Lady Deland drew up in her chair, composing herself with an effort and replying gratefully:

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Carter; but, oh, this is terrible. How could I have done such a thing? Tell me the worst. Let me know the worst."

Nick then informed her as briefly as possible of the strange combination of circumstances resulting in the loss of the fateful document and her letter relating to it, adding, with convincing earnestness:

"Senator Barclay is in no sense to blame for the misfortune. He thought the safest place for the document during the single night he was to retain it was in the pocket of the coat in his own room."

"Oh, I do not blame him, Mr. Carter," said Lady Deland, who now had nerved herself to meet the trying situation. "Senator Barclay is a very dear friend, and a man in whom I have absolute confidence. Otherwise I never could have taken such a step, which I truly felt would be the best for all concerned."

"I appreciate that, I assure you."

"But what can be done? How can——"

"That is what I now wish to discuss with you, Lady Deland, and to point out what I require of you," Nick interposed. "I think that we may yet thwart Andy Margate and recover the document in time to save you from exposure."

"But that dreadful man! He must know——"

"Never mind what he knows about it," Nick again interrupted. "If I can land him and recover the docu-

ment, I will make very sure that neither he nor any of his confederates will afterward reveal anything. I will put them where they can accomplish nothing. Besides, Lady Deland, revelations on their part would fall flat when opposed with denials from persons of your character and that of Senator Barclay."

"But what can be done, Mr. Carter?" she anxiously inquired.

Nick then proceeded to tell her of his suspicions, of the only way by which advantage of the document would probably be taken, and that it must be attempted that very day in order to be effective.

"I understand," she bowed, after hearing him.

"There is only one way by which it could be done, Lady Deland, and only one method that really appears feasible," Nick continued. "One is by the use of the telephone, which presents too many difficulties and contingencies for me to think that method will be adopted."

"And the other?"

"The other is with a personal interview with you, possibly by Margate himself, though much more probably by one of his confederates," Nick continued to explain. "Though a daring and desperate man, I doubt that Margate will venture here in person."

"But what am I to do?"

"These rascals will have only one object in view, that of forcing you to pay them a large sum of money, or perhaps turn over your jewels to them. Just how they will attempt it remains to be seen, and I wish to be in a position to direct what occurs here. That must be accomplished without incurring the suspicions of the person whom Margate may send."

"But how can you do that, Mr. Carter?" Lady Deland doubtfully inquired. "It will be necessary for me to see the person."

"Very true," Nick admitted, glancing around the room. "I think, however, that we can arrange it. Where does that door lead?" he added, pointing to one across which a portière was partly drawn.

"To Sir Edward's private study," said Lady Deland.

"Is there another door leading out of the room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"Into the side hall."

"Capital!" said Nick, with manifest satisfaction. "From where you sit, Lady Deland, by glancing into the mirror over the fireplace, I think you can see into the study."

"Yes, sir, I can."

"You can do so, I observe by merely turning your eyes in the direction of the mirror."

"I can, Mr. Carter."

"If you were to do so merely casually, a person seated here would have no idea that you were in communication with a person in the study," said Nick. "By turning my chair in this direction, I can see the mirror, but not the study door, nor any reflection of it."

"Oh, I now see what you mean," Lady Deland exclaimed. "You wish to signal me from the study, by means of the mirror, while I am talking with the person you suspect will come here."

"Exactly," Nick replied. "I will stand so that you can see a reflection of me, and I will signify with a nod, or with a negative shake of my head, what course you must shape."

"I understand you perfectly."

"It will be necessary for you to yield to whatever design may be attempted."

"Have you any idea of what it will consist?"

"I think you will be required to go somewhere, both to get and deliver a price for the document, and also in order to receive the letter."

"I will go," said Lady Deland quickly. "I shall not fear. I would dare anything, Mr. Carter, to recover it."

"Something more will be necessary," Nick replied. "I wish to go with you with one of my assistants, who will presently arrive here."

"But will that be allowed?"

"We must fool whoever comes here into allowing it," smiled Nick.

"Will that be possible?"

"I think so, in view of the fact that much is at stake, and that there is no time for other arrangements. You must insist upon going in your touring car, and upon taking your chauffeur and your maid."

"Well?"

"You can state that they know nothing about the business engaging you, and that the crooks will incur no danger from your having these uninformed companions. They will have guarded against danger, all right, as a matter of fact. I know such rascals root and branch."

"But I don't understand," Lady Deland said doubtfully. "What can my maid and chauffeur accomplish?"

"Leave that to me," Nick replied, smiling again. "I shall be your chauffeur, Lady Deland, and your maid will be Patsy Garvan, my assistant, who can make up very cleverly as a girl in the twenties."

"Oh, I now see at what you are driving," cried Lady Deland, with countenance lighting.

"You must provide him with the necessary garments, however," Nick added. "We have all else that will be required."

"I will do so, Mr. Carter."

"I also wish to take your butler's place for a time, that I may determine whether any visitor warrants suspicion, and also take steps consistent with our design."

"You may do so," Lady Deland said readily. "I will give you all the assistance in my power."

"We will make all of the necessary arrangements after my assistant arrives," Nick rejoined. "I shall want a coat, cap, and gloves belonging to your chauffeur. We will put them in an adjoining room, where I can easily and quickly get them. I will wear a different disguise in the two characters I shall assume, and—ah, there is the doorbell. That should be Patsy. In half an hour, Lady Deland, we shall have completed our arrangements."

CHAPTER X.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

It was after two o'clock that afternoon when Nancy Selig, following instructions received from Andy Margate, rang the bell at the Deland residence and prepared, with all the nerve and effrontery of one of her class, to carry out the coercive design of her knavish confederate.

A butler answered the bell—but not the usual butler.

"I would like an interview with Lady Deland," said Nancy, bowing and smiling with affected gentility.

"I will take in your card, madame," Nick replied, with blank countenance. "Or if you will state what your business is, I will inform her of your request."

"She does not know me by name," Nancy coolly announced. "I am soliciting contributions to a very worthy cause, and I was sent here by a friend of Lady Deland. Will you kindly tell her so, and say," she added, quite pointedly, "that she may hear something greatly to her advantage."

Nick Carter needed to hear no more than that. He bowed and vanished.

Two minutes later he returned, saying a bit stiffly:

"Lady Deland will see you."

"I thought she would," remarked Nancy, with covert dryness.

Nick conducted her to the library and ushered her into the room.

Lady Deland arose to receive her and pointed to a chair.

Nancy Selig took it without the ghost of a suspicion.

Nick withdrew and closed the door, then stepped noiselessly through the side hall and into the diplomat's study.

The first words that fell upon his ears from the library told him that Nancy Selig had lost no time in approaching the business engaging her.

"You can safely admit it to me, since you say there is no one to hear us," she was adding to what already had passed between them. "There is nothing in mincing matters. The question is—do you want to recover it?"

"Assuming that you really know what you have stated, and that I have lost such an article as you suggest, I naturally would be anxious to recover it," Lady Deland replied.

"There's just one way you can do it," said Nancy.

"How is that?"

"By paying for it."

"Pay whom? Are you the person who has it?"

"No. A man has it who——"

"Send him here, then," Lady Deland interrupted. "I will talk with him."

"Don't be a fool," Nancy said curtly. "And don't pretend that the paper is of no great value to you. We know better than that, we who have it. You listen to me for half a minute and I'll tell you just where you stand and what you must do."

Lady Deland's eyes drifted toward the mirror for an instant and she received from the listening detective a signal of assent.

"Well, I will hear you," she replied, gazing at the crafty, determined face of her visitor.

What Nancy Selig had to say may easily be imagined, and she wound up her threatening remarks with the announcement that Lady Deland must pay ten thousand dollars for the return of the document and her letter to Senator Barclay, or that both would be sent to her husband the moment he returned to Washington.

Lady Deland played her part consistently, now and then receiving a signal from Nick, and evincing apprehensions that soon convinced Nancy Selig of her own ultimate success.

"All you need do is go with me and pay down the money," she announced, at length. "When you return home, you'll have the two papers."

"But I haven't so much money in the house," Lady Deland protested.

"Draw it from the bank," said Nance curtly. "There still is time."

"Where am I to go with you?"

"To a house a few miles from the city."

Lady Deland demurred over that, pretending that she feared to do so, and she wound up with insisting that she would go only in her own touring car, in company with her maid and chauffeur.

Nancy Selig objected strongly to that, and for several minutes the argument between the two women continued, but the outlook for success finally overcame Nancy's objections.

"Well, I agree to that, then," she said, with a threatening frown. "But you're not to leave me, or have any talk with them that I cannot hear. I'll ride with you and go into the bank with you. I'll not stand for any monkey business, you can bet on that."

"There will be no monkey business, whatever that is," said Lady Deland coldly.

"Call your maid here, then, and give her your directions," snapped Nancy. "Send for the chauffeur, too, so we can make a quick get-away."

Lady Deland touched a bell on the library table.

Nick entered from the hall half a minute later.

"Send my maid, Hawley," said Lady Deland; Nance constantly watching her.

"Yes, your ladyship," bowed Nick.

Another half minute brought Patsy Garvan into the room, so cleverly made up as a girl as to have deceived the most discerning observer.

"Put on your outside garments, Lucy, and bring mine to the front hall," said Lady Deland.

"Yes, madame," said Patsy demurely.

"Also tell Hawley to send James to the front door with the touring car," added Lady Deland. "I want both of you to go with me for a few hours."

"Yes, madame."

Patsy bowed and withdrew.

Nick already was on his way to the garage.

Lady Deland opened her desk in the library and removed a bank book.

"Now, woman, I am ready," she said coldly.

She was not more ready than Nancy Selig, who now felt sure that she was not being tricked.

Five minutes later the touring car, driven by Nick, with Patsy on the seat beside him and with Lady Deland and Nance in the tonneau, sped away from the house and turned toward the business section of the city.

Nick had been quietly informed as to the bank and its location, at which they arrived twenty minutes later, and into which Nancy accompanied Lady Deland, leaving the supposed chauffeur and maid in the car.

"Gee! this looks like soft walking, chief, now," remarked Patsy, while they waited.

"Quite so," Nick replied. "I think we shall land the goods and arrest the gang. That woman hasn't even the ghost of a suspicion."

Nick was right.

With crafty foresight, bent upon not arriving at the road house until just after dark, Nancy Selig directed the supposed chauffeur over a roundabout course that thus served her purpose.

It was between five and six when the light from the touring car swerved quickly from the woodland road, and the car itself ran noiselessly in toward the shed and stable back of the road house.

"Come!" Nance said quietly, quickly alighting and addressing Lady Deland. "You two servants stay here."

Nick Carter bowed, standing at the door he had alighted to open.

Lady Deland started to get out of the car.

Then came a crash from within the house, the thud of a fallen body, and then the fierce and furious shouts of Andy Margate, every word of which reached the detective's ears.

Nick turned like a flash and seized Nancy Selig by the throat.

"Handcuffs, Patsy," he muttered. "Be quick. Chick is here before us."

Patsy was out and at work before the last was said, and in thirty seconds Nancy Selig was lying on the ground, manacled hand and foot.

Lady Deland was nearly fainting, but neither detective noticed her.

Both rushed to the back door, still ajar and showing a beam of light.

Nick was the first to reach and open it, dashing into the hall, revolver in hand. He saw Chick on the floor, the four men above him, and the hand of Andy Margate raised with a revolver to beat out the fallen detective's brains.

Nick fired on the instant, and the bullet went true.

Margate pitched forward in a heap, with an ounce of lead in his brain, and instant consternation and dismay fell upon his three confederates.

"Hands up, you fellows, or there'll be another corpse here," Nick cried sternly, with the rascals effectively covered. "Look after Chick, Patsy. I can attend to these rats."

The "rats" did not dare to show fight. They yielded with curses and imprecations, and within ten more minutes the case was practically ended. All were secured, followed later by Zeke Selig's wife, and the entire family went to prison for a term of years for their work of that night.

Andy Margate did not revive from the dose Nick Carter had given him, as he had from that taken from his own hand. This time, indeed, he was as dead as a doornail.

The document, as well as the property stolen from Senator Barclay, were easily found and restored to proper hands, and the circumstances were never even dreamed of by Sir Edward Deland, much to the relief and gratitude of the beautiful girl whom Nick had served so cleverly.

He went even farther than that, moreover, interceding with a local judge for the medical students, with the result that their transgression was never made public, and the Dabney Medical College escaped without a smirch on its reputation.

So the strange case ended to the satisfaction of all—save the knaves responsible for it.

THE END.

"The Mark of Cain; or, Nick Carter's Air-line Case," will be the title of the long, complete story which you will find in the next issue, No. 148, of the NICK CARTER STORIES, out July 10th. You will also find several other articles of interest, together with the usual installment of the serial now running.

Sheridan of the U. S. Mail.

By RALPH BOSTON.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOSS DEFIED.

The man in the gray uniform of Uncle Sam's postal service laughed lightly. "Don't talk like a boob," he said. "I'm not defying any organization, and I have no desire to make an enemy of Mr. Samuel J. Coggswell or anybody else. If he's petty and narrow-minded enough to get sore on me just because I refuse to give up five dollars for a picnic ticket for which I have no earthly use, well, I can't help it."

The smile upon his good-humored face suddenly gave place to a sterner expression. "And let me tell you," he went on, "I don't like your method of selling tickets. The way you go about it looks to me very much like blackmail. I never had the pleasure of meeting your friend, Mr. Coggswell, but if he instructed you to hold up strangers on the street, and hand them that line of talk, I haven't any use for him; and you can tell him I said so."

The stout, red-faced, flashily dressed young man who had accosted the letter carrier on the street corner just as the latter was about to enter Branch Post Office X Y, scowled at this utterance.

"Oh, I'll tell him, all right," he retorted. "You can bet he's goin' to hear about your freshness. What's your name, anyway?"

"Owen Sheridan," was the prompt reply.

The other produced a pencil and memorandum book from his vest pocket and ostentatiously made a note of the name.

"Very well, Mr. Sheridan," he sneered, "we'll see how you'll feel when you're on Boss Coggswell's black list. Guess he'll make you lose that cocky air before long."

He turned on his heel and sauntered off up the street. Carrier Sheridan, who had just returned from his delivery route, entered the post office and went upstairs to the "swing room"—the place in which the carriers lounge between tours—and joined a dozen of his gray-coated comrades who were indulging in a few minutes of idle chatter.

"I had a funny experience just now," he said; "a chap buttonholed me on the corner and tried to sell me a ticket to the Samuel J. Coggswell Association's annual chowder and outing. When I refused to come across with five dollars, and told him I had no desire to go to the outing, he got sore and began to threaten me with the wrath of Mr. Coggswell. He said it meant my finish in the postal service if I wouldn't give up. Can you beat that for cast-iron nerve?"

Instead of the loud laugh which he expected, some of the carriers smiled sheepishly, and others looked grave.

"You don't mean to say that you refused to take the ticket, son?" exclaimed "Pop" Andrews, a grizzled carrier, whose coat sleeve bore two gold stars, signifying that he had seen forty years' service in the department.

"I certainly did refuse," replied young Sheridan indignantly. "Do you suppose for a minute that I'd let any man blackmail me into giving up money for something I don't want?"

Pop Andrews shook his head deprecatingly. "That was foolish of you, very foolish. If you want to get along in this business, you can't afford to antagonize 'Boss' Coggswell. You haven't been in New York long, so perhaps you don't know who and what he is?"

"Oh, yes, I do," replied Sheridan, with a smile. "I've heard of him, of course. He's a politician, and the leader of this assembly district; but I don't see what reason I've got to be afraid of him as long as I do my duty. This is a civil-service job, and——"

Several of the men interrupted him with bitter laughter. Pop Andrews undertook to explain the reason for their mirth.

"Civil service is all right as far as it goes, son," he said gravely, "but the trouble is, it don't go very far—not nearly as far as the pull of Samuel J. Coggswell.

"You see," he went on, "the boss has got so much influence at Washington that he can get pretty near anything he wants. If he wishes to boost a postal employee's salary, or land him a soft berth, he can do it with a few strokes of his pen, or a few words on the long-distance wire. But if he wishes to keep a man down, he only has to put in a knock at headquarters, and the poor fellow's goose is cooked. You can slave, and study, and take all the civil-service exams you want, but you'll never get promotion while you're on Samuel J. Coggswell's black list."

"You don't mean it?" exclaimed Sheridan in astonishment. "Then that fellow spoke the truth? I thought he was only trying to bluff me into buying a ticket for the outing."

"He gave it to you straight," replied the veteran postman. "You shouldn't have refused to buy the ticket. I guess you're the only employee in this branch that hasn't got one."

"Is that right, boys?" demanded the astonished carrier, turning incredulously to his comrades. "You don't mean to say that you are all going to the outing?"

The other carriers laughed. "I reckon there's mighty few of us that'll be there," said one. "I gave my ticket to a feller that keeps a delicatessen shop on my route, this morning. It wasn't any use to me."

"Then why on earth did you buy it?" demanded Sheridan indignantly.

"For the reason that Pop has just given you—because I want to stand in right with Coggswell," was the candid reply. "That's why we all buy 'em each year. It's Coggswell's little graft. He knows that we haven't any use for the tickets, but it's his pleasant little way of collecting five dollars a year from each of us. Considerin' the pull he's got at headquarters, we think it's a mighty good investment."

"I think it's a dirty piece of blackmail," declared Sheridan, his eyes flashing. "Before I'd submit to it, I'd——"

"Don't be rash, son," broke in Pop Andrews. "That kind of talk sounds good behind the footlights at a theater, but, take it from me, it won't carry you very far in the service. You're young and ambitious, you want to get 'way up in the department; take my advice, and win the friendship of the man whose pull can put you there. You might begin by joining his organization. That's what a good many of the fellows in this branch are doing. They're wise enough to see the advantage of being a member of the Samuel J. Coggswell Association."

"But I'm on the other side of the fence," protested Sheridan. "My politics——"

"I don't care what your politics are," interrupted the grizzled carrier, with a sly wink. "When Election Day comes you can vote whatever way you want. We all do that. Coggswell has no way of telling in which column you put the cross. But in between elections, belong to the organization and whoop it up for Coggswell all you can. In that way you're sure to bring yourself to the boss' attention."

"I guess I've brought myself to his attention already," said Sheridan, with a whimsical smile. "You see, Pop, in addition to refusing to buy a ticket, I sent him a message, telling him just what I think of him and his blackmailing methods."

"Phew!" exclaimed several of the carriers, looking at their comrade commiseratingly. Owen Sheridan was very popular with the employees of Branch X Y, and they would have been sorry to see him come to grief.

"What sort of a man was this fellow you were up against?" inquired Pop Andrews gravely.

"A chap about my own age, I should judge; rather stout, with a red, beefy face, and dressed to kill," replied Owen. "He had a diamond in his necktie so big that it almost blinded me, and he was smoking a big black cigar that I guess only a politician could afford to buy."

"That was Jake Hines," declared one of the men. "He's Coggswell's right-hand man."

"Jake's not a bad sort, if he's handled right," said Pop Andrews. "If I were you, Owen, I'd go and see him this evening. You'll find him at the clubhouse. He hangs round there nearly every night."

"Go and see him? What for?" demanded Sheridan in astonishment.

"To have a talk with him and straighten things out, of course. You don't want to lose any time rectifying the blunder you've made. Tell Jake that you've been thinking things over, and you've decided that you'd like one of those tickets, after all. If you can afford it, it would be a good scheme to take two, to help smooth things over, you know."

Owen Sheridan laughed heartily at this suggestion. "Say, if I could get the job of postmaster general tomorrow merely by buying one of those tickets, I wouldn't buy one!" he declared resolutely.

CHAPTER II.

SUMMONED BY THE BOSS.

Owen Sheridan's comrades had not been guilty of exaggeration in warning the young man of the danger he ran in antagonizing Boss Coggswell. Great reforms have been effected in the United States postal service since the time when Sheridan entered the department, and politicians of Samuel J. Coggswell's ilk are no longer able to terrorize and corrupt the employees by means of a "pull" at Washington.

A certain famous post-office investigation resulted in the indictment of many big and little postal officials, and the laying bare of a startling system of fraud, corruption, and official misconduct; and made it, happily, a thing of the past; but before that big house-cleaning occurred, the power of the political boss was a thing to be feared by every carrier and clerk in the department.

Owen was not greatly disturbed by the warnings. Young, optimistic, self-confident, he could scarcely bring himself to believe that the big career he had mapped out for himself in the department could be checked or affected merely by his refusal to buy a ticket to a political picnic.

The idea appeared preposterous. He would succeed, he told himself confidently, in spite of the antagonism of Samuel J. Coggswell and his lieutenant, Jake Hines. He was painstaking, a hustler, and keen of mind; these qualities, he felt sure, were bound to win his promotion in time—even without any politician's pull.

"No, I'm not worrying much about Mr. Coggswell," he said to himself, with a smile, as he stood at his "case" in the post office, sorting the mail for his delivery route, the morning after his encounter with Jake Hines. "But what is worrying me a lot more," he went on, with a frown, "is this confounded—— By Jove! Here's another one of 'em now!"

The cause of his emotion was an envelope which had just turned up in the pile of mail he was sorting. For several minutes his long, nimble fingers had been going through the heap of letters with such speed and dexterity that it seemed impossible that he could be separating and arranging them in rotation, according to the house numbers on his delivery route. He seemed scarcely to glance at the addresses on the envelopes; it appeared to be a purely mechanical operation.

Although there was nothing about this particular white envelope to make it conspicuous, Owen recognized it as soon as it turned up. With a look of deep disgust on his face he withdrew it from the pile.

"This is the fifth he has sent her in the past week," he muttered. "I wonder who the fellow is, and what he is to her. I wish I knew.

"But, of course, I wouldn't do anything like that," he added hastily, ashamed of the unspoken thought. "It is mighty tough, though, to have to deliver your rival's letters to the girl you love. To suspect that there is a rival is bad enough; but to have to be the bearer of his confounded letters is certainly rubbing it in."

Uncle Sam's men in gray are supposed to be mere automatons when it comes to delivering mail. One of the rules of the department is to the effect that carriers must not indulge in any unnecessary conversation while covering their routes; and, of course, they are not supposed to ask any questions or betray any curiosity concerning the letters they carry.

Owen Sheridan was well up on the rules and regulations, but he vowed, as he stepped out of the office to cover his route, that he was going to find out the significance of that letter before another hour had passed.

For thirty minutes he went briskly from house to house, stuffing mail into letter boxes, ringing each bell, blowing his whistle in every vestibule he visited; then, having finished his row of flat houses and private dwellings on the side street, he swung into the avenue and stopped outside a store, on the window of which was the sign, in gilt lettering: "Walter K. Sammis, Real Estate and Insurance."

For a second he stood on the sidewalk as though afraid to go in. Then he drew a long breath and entered, a half dozen letters in his hand, among them the envelope which was causing him so much concern.

A young woman who sat at a typewriter behind the barrier which divided the office in two, looked up from her machine, and greeted him with a cordial smile.

"Good morning," she said. "You're a little late today, aren't you? I've been waiting impatiently for you—I mean the mail, for the past ten minutes."

She was a very pretty girl. Her hair was dark, her eyes were brown and very large and bright, her cheeks bewitchingly pink. The young carrier thrilled as he looked at her.

"Yes, the mail is kind of late this morning, Miss Worthington," he said awkwardly. "I've got an unusually big delivery to-day." He held out the bunch of letters in his hand. "Here are five for the boss and one for you."

He watched her face anxiously as she extended her hand for the mail. His own grew dark as he saw her eyes light up at the sight of the handwriting on the envelope addressed to her.

"You—you seem to be getting an awful lot of mail from Chicago lately," he remarked gloomily.

She nodded and smiled brightly. "Yes, I am very fortunate. This is the fifth this week."

"And all from the same fellow!" he exclaimed, with a bitter laugh.

"Why, how do you know that?" she demanded, looking at him quizzically from under her long lashes.

"Oh, don't you suppose I can recognize the handwriting?" was his sullen reply.

"Really?" She laughed. "I didn't think you letter carriers were so smart. Considering the thousands of letters you must handle in the course of a week, I should think it would be impossible for you to remember the handwriting of each——"

"I'd like to know who he is!" Owen broke in impulsively.

"Why, really, Mr. Sheridan!" she exclaimed. "I think you are rather impertinent. Unless I am greatly mistaken, the contents of the letters you handle do not concern you at all. Your duty is to deliver mail, and it ends there."

Her tone was one of great indignation, but there was a merry twinkle in her eye. He was so dejected, however, that he did not notice the twinkle.

"The contents of that particular letter do concern me very much, Miss Worthington," he returned doggedly. "As a letter carrier, I admit I have no right to ask you any questions; but as a man—well, I've got to know what that fellow is to you. I've got to know what chance I stand against him. I've been suffering the whole week—ever since the first of those confounded letters made its appearance, and I can't stand it any longer."

Then, before he realized what he was doing, Owen Sheridan was blurting out a proposal of marriage. The words came impulsively from his lips. When he entered the real-estate office five minutes previously, he hadn't the slightest intention of taking such a decisive step.

He was in love with the girl, to be sure, and for several weeks past had been telling himself that some day he would ask her to be his wife. But he had also told himself that the day was far off. He was not in a position to think of marrying as yet. He had been in the postal service for less than a year, and consequently was receiving only six hundred dollars per year.

To marry on six hundred a year—less than twelve

dollars per week—looked much too difficult. And out of this modest wage, too, he had to buy his uniforms—complete outfits for both summer and winter wear. He would have to work for at least five years more before he attained the rank of fifth-grade carrier and a salary of eleven hundred dollars, on which he could support a wife.

For this reason he had hesitated to speak out before; but now jealousy, aroused by those letters from Chicago, forced the words from his lips.

The blood rushed to Dallas Worthington's cheeks as she listened to him. "You—you want me to marry you?" she gasped. "You can't mean it. Why, you scarcely know me at all!"

"Scarcely know you?" he protested. "Haven't I been seeing you every day for the past six months?"

"Yes; but only when you've come in here to bring the mail. You can't learn enough about a girl to make up your mind that——"

"Well, it isn't my fault that I haven't seen you after office hours," he protested. "I've asked you often enough to let me take you out or call at your boarding house, but you've always turned me down.

"But, anyway," he went on earnestly, "I know you well enough to feel sure that you're the only girl for me. Why, I'm so crazy about you, that on deliveries when there hasn't been any mail for this address, I've delivered the wrong letters here on purpose, just so as to have an excuse for dropping in and seeing you."

The girl laughed. "Oh! So that's why this office is always getting other people's mail. I've often wondered how you could be so careless."

"Isn't there any chance for me, Miss Worthington?" the young carrier asked pleadingly, as he glanced at the clock on the wall of the real-estate office, and suddenly realized that if he dallied there much longer there would be complaints all along his route; for the bag suspended from his shoulder was still half full of undelivered mail, and people in New York City are very particular about getting their letters on time.

"I don't ask you to marry me now," he went on hastily. "I couldn't do it even if you were willing, for I'm not making enough money. The United States government pays its postal employees poorly at the start. I guess there isn't another branch of the Federal civil service where a fellow has to do so much for so little pay."

"Why don't you get out and go into something else?" she asked. "I've often wondered why a bright fellow like you should be satisfied with such a small job."

"I want to be a post-office inspector," he answered. "That's the goal which tempted me into entering the service. Those fellows earn good money, and I've always had a liking for detective work. You can rest assured that I don't intend to remain a carrier very long. To be promoted to the secret-service branch of the department is my ambition, and I feel confident that I'll be able to realize it."

"I feel sure you will," the girl said softly, with a quick glance at his earnest face. "And—and I'll wait for you, Owen—until you're in a position to get married."

"You will?" he exclaimed joyously. "I didn't expect such luck. Then, those letters from Chicago——"

"Were from my brother," she answered, with a laugh. "He's two years younger than I, and he's always getting into scrapes. He's in another one now, and he needs money; that's why he's been writing so frequently the past week."

CHAPTER III.

THE WIGGLING EAR.

Owen finished his deliveries and returned to the post office with a much lighter heart than when he had started out.

"She's promised to wait for me, and I'm the happiest man in the world," he said to himself with a smile. "And she won't have to wait so very long, either. I'm going after that post-office inspector job hammer and tongs—and nothing can stop me from getting it."

"Are you Carrier Owen Sheridan?" inquired a voice, suddenly breaking in upon his happy meditations.

"Yes," answered Owen to the young man who addressed him.

"Well, you're to come around to the club at nine-thirty this evening," went on the latter, in a peremptory manner.

"The club! What club?" demanded Owen, staring hard at the speaker, whom he had never seen before.

"The district organization, of course," replied the young man impatiently. "You didn't suppose I meant the Elks or the Knights of Pythias, did you? You're to come around to the headquarters of the Samuel J. Coggswell Association at nine-thirty sharp. The boss wants to see you."

Having delivered this laconic message, the young man hurried away, and Owen stood on the threshold of the post-office entrance looking after him in great astonishment.

"Boss Coggswell wants to see me!" he muttered to himself. "I wonder what on earth for."

Then a ray of enlightenment came to him, and he grinned broadly. "I guess Jake Hines has reported to him what I said about those tickets, and his majesty has sent for me to demand an explanation and an apology."

A frown displaced the grin upon his countenance. "I'd like to see myself going," he muttered. "If Coggswell wants any explanation, he'll have to come to me; and, at that, I guess he won't get a lot of satisfaction."

But, after a half hour's reflection, he changed his mind and decided that it might be just as well for him to heed the summons, insultingly peremptory as its delivery had been.

"If I don't go he may think I'm afraid to face him," he told himself; "and, besides, I'm mighty anxious to hear what he has to say."

So, at nine-thirty that evening, Owen, being through with his day's work, proceeded to the headquarters of the Samuel J. Coggswell Association, a four-story brown-stone structure on a quiet residence street.

The quarters of the district organization were luxurious for a political club. Handsome oil paintings in big gilt frames lined the walls of the reception hall into which the letter carrier stepped.

One painting, which hung on the wall opposite the entrance, so that a visitor's eye was bound to strike it as soon as he stepped through the door, was the full-length portrait of a dark, rather stout gentleman, who stood with his arms folded and his chin sunk upon

his chest—a pose made famous by the late Napoleon Bonaparte, and since copied by many others.

A brass plate attached to the massive gilt frame of this portrait in oils bore the legend: "Honorable Samuel J. Coggswell." By this token Owen knew that he was gazing upon the likeness of the man whom he had come to see. He had never before met or seen Boss Coggswell, and had no idea what he looked like; so, while he waited to be announced, he studied the picture with great interest.

He was greatly astonished at what he saw. From what he had heard and read of political bosses in general, he had formed the impression that they were all rough, thick-necked, illiterate men of a rough type.

He had imagined that Coggswell would be like this; but the face which looked at him from the painting was one of refinement; the forehead was broad and high, the features were regular, the mouth was curved in a kind, almost benevolent, smile. Unless the artist had unduly flattered him, Boss Coggswell looked very much like a gentleman, and a very pleasant sort of gentleman at that.

The young man who had gone to announce Owen's arrival to the boss soon returned and beckoned to the letter carrier to follow him. He led the way through a billiard room, and among the men playing at the tables Owen recognized Jake Hines, the man who had tried in vain to intimidate him into buying a ticket to the club outing.

Although the carrier was not now wearing his gray uniform, the recognition was mutual. Owen could tell that by the scowl which came to Hines' face at the sight of him, and, as he passed the table at which the politician was playing, he heard him mutter something under his breath which sounded like "fresh young Aleck."

Up a flight of stairs which led to a door marked "Director's Office—Private," Owen's guide conducted him.

In response to a knock on this door, a deep, pleasant voice cried, "Come in!" and Owen found himself in a luxuriously furnished room, facing a rotund, smiling, middle-aged man who sat at a mahogany roll-top desk.

One glance at Boss Coggswell convinced the letter carrier that the oil painting downstairs was an excellent portrait. The district leader certainly appeared to be a very pleasant man. It seemed hard to believe that he could be the kind of fellow who would persecute a humble post-office employee for refusing to give up five dollars for a ticket to a club outing.

"Sit down, young man," said Mr. Coggswell, motioning to a chair beside his desk. "You are Carrier Sheridan, I believe, and you have route number forty-eight?"

"Yes," answered Owen, inwardly wondering why the political leader should have taken the trouble to familiarize himself with the number of his delivery route.

"I am informed," went on Mr. Coggswell, with a gentle smile, "that you refused to buy a ticket to the annual chowder and outing of our association."

"Yes," replied Owen, meeting his questioner's gaze boldly. To himself he thought: "He certainly isn't losing any time in getting down to business."

"And I am informed, also," Boss Coggswell went on, still with the same gentle smile, "that you expressed an opinion that my method of selling tickets was closely akin to blackmail?"

"I didn't say exactly that," returned Owen. "I don't know what your method of selling tickets may be; but I did say that if you instructed or sanctioned your followers to hold up government employees and threaten them with all sorts of dire disaster if they refused to buy those tickets, you were a blackmailer, and I had no use for you."

He looked Coggswell squarely in the eye. "And, moreover, I am still of the same opinion," he added quietly.

For a few seconds the two men sat eying each other; then the political boss suddenly leaned forward in his chair and placed his plump hand upon Owen's shoulder.

"Young man," he said, "I like you for that. You make a hit with me. A fellow who is not afraid to speak out always has my admiration. I despise a man who will submit to injustice and tyranny for fear of losing his job, or the hope of getting a better one."

To say that Owen was astonished by this unlooked-for treatment would be to put it mildly. He looked at the speaker incredulously. The suspicion entered his head that, perhaps, Coggswell was merely playing with him as a cat plays with a mouse—handing him these verbal bouquets first of all in order to give the more force to the abuse and threats which were about to follow.

"Yes," the boss went on, "as soon as I heard that there was a young man at Branch X Y who had the courage to defy me, I made up my mind to send for him. I wanted to see what you looked like. I wished to find out whether you would have backbone enough to stand by what you had said to Jake Hines, or whether you would cringe and back water as soon as I put it up to you."

Owen, not knowing what answer to make to these amazing words, smiled lightly and remained silent.

After a slight pause Boss Coggswell went on:

"I am pretty good at sizing up men, Mr. Sheridan, and I like your style. I should be pleased to have you join my organization. We need young men of your caliber in this district."

"Thank you," replied Owen, "but I don't care to go into politics. And, besides, I am of the opposite party."

"I like you for saying that, too," declared the district leader warmly. "It is refreshing to meet a young man who is so loyal to his party that he won't desert it even to advance himself. I am sorry that we can't have you in our organization, Mr. Sheridan, but I am going to help you, nevertheless; I have taken a great fancy to you, and I am going to see that you get ahead.

"Tell me a little about yourself," he went on. "How long have you been in the postal service?"

"Nine months," answered Owen.

"And what is your ambition? Surely, a bright young chap like you doesn't intend to remain a carrier all his life?"

"Not if I can help it," replied Owen, with a smile. "I am looking for the job of post-office inspector. That's what caused me to enter the service."

"Ah!" murmured Coggswell; "a post-office inspector, eh? You know a good thing when you see it, don't you? Got any pull?"

"No, I haven't. But I'm studying hard, and I think I shall soon be able to take the examinations, and ——"

A loud laugh from Boss Coggswell interrupted him.

"The examinations? Pshaw! They won't get you very far unless you've got a pretty strong pull, besides."

He looked keenly at the young man, and lowered his voice a trifle as he went on:

"Now, as I presume you are aware, I have considerable influence at Washington. I think I shall use that influence to get you what you want, Mr. Sheridan."

Owen stared at him incredulously. "Are you joking with me?" he demanded.

"Not at all. I am perfectly serious. As I said before, you have made a big hit with me, and I want to help you. To get you the post you are looking for will not be difficult. You may have to wait a little while, for there are no vacancies at present, but I give you my word that as soon as one occurs you shall be made an inspector."

He rose from his chair and held out his hand to Owen to indicate that the interview was at an end.

"Well, good-by. I am very glad to have met you," he said heartily. "Stick to your job as carrier for the present, and rest assured that it won't be very long before you will be in the department's secret service."

Feeling as if he were in a dream, Owen rose and walked toward the door; but just as he was about to turn the handle, Coggswell's voice halted him.

"Oh, by the way," said the politician, in a careless tone, "there is one little point that I had almost forgotten. I think you cover route number forty-eight, do you not?"

"Yes, that is my regular route."

Coggswell drew nearer to Owen and lowered his voice almost to a whisper. "Well, Sheridan, suppose there was somebody residing on your route whose mail I happened to be interested in? Suppose I had good reasons for wishing to examine this man's letters, without his knowledge, of course. Suppose I asked you not to deliver anything to him until after it had first passed through my hands, or the hands of a trusted agent? What would you say to that, Sheridan?"

"I would tell you to go to blazes!" replied Owen promptly. "I am not a crook, Mr. Coggswell."

So here was the nigger in the woodpile, at last. This was the meaning of all the soft words that had gone before, and the glittering promise which the politician had made to him.

"You are quite sure that you wouldn't do me a little favor like that?" the boss went on, looking searchingly into the young man's face.

"Quite," answered Owen shortly.

"Not even if your promotion to the job of post-office inspector depended upon it? One good turn deserves another, you know."

"I would rather remain a carrier all my life than stoop to such dirty work," declared the carrier hotly.

"Better think it over, Sheridan. Don't be rash. It would be a pity for a bright young fellow like you to have his career ruined for a little thing like this. You understand, of course, that there wouldn't be the slightest danger of this man finding out that his mail had been tampered with? He would receive every letter in perfect shape. You wouldn't be running any possible risk of discovery."

"That doesn't make any difference," retorted Owen. "Whether it's safe to do so or not, nobody is going to tamper with any mail that's in my charge."

"You really mean that? You're not making any grandstand play, eh?"

"I never meant anything more in my life, Mr. Coggswell."

For several seconds the two men stood staring fixedly into each other's eyes. Then, suddenly, Boss Coggswell once more placed his hand upon the carrier's shoulder.

"It was only a joke, my boy. Or, rather, I should say, it was a little test. I wanted to determine your strength of character, and I must say that you have met the test remarkably well. I know now, for sure, that you are honest, and not to be tempted. Good-by."

With a paternal pat on the shoulder the politician dismissed his visitor.

Owen was very thoughtful as he walked out of the clubhouse. He was not by any means convinced that the sinister proposition which had been made to him was nothing more than a harmless ruse to test his character.

In spite of the politician's reassuring words, he felt sure that Coggswell had been very much in earnest about wanting him to hand over the mail of somebody on his route—that was the real reason he had been summoned to the clubhouse.

Owen recalled something which he had once heard somebody say regarding Samuel J. Coggswell—a very queer remark which had been made in his presence one day by a man who knew the boss well: "When you are talking with Sammy," this man had said, "watch his ears carefully. If they begin to wiggle, look out for a crooked deal. Most men can't move their ears without moving the rest of their heads besides, but Boss Coggswell can wiggle either ear at will. And, whenever he's up to some low trick, those ears of his always begin to move. He can keep the rest of his face as straight as a poker player; he can smile on you as sweetly as if he loved you like a brother, when all the time he hates you like poison; he can keep his voice as smooth as velvet; but he can't make his ears behave when there's anything crooked going on inside his head."

Owen recalled these words now, as he stepped out of the clubhouse. And he recalled, too, that all the while Samuel J. Coggswell had been talking to him about that scheme to tamper with the United States mail, his ears had been moving up and down as if on springs. Therefore, Owen felt sure that there was mischief brewing.

TO BE CONTINUED.

UNEXPECTED.

He had been trying to impress upon the children in the school, in the capacity of a temperance lecturer, that though it was right and proper to relieve suffering and poverty, it was much better to find out the cause of it all—drink, of course—and remove that; and so with everything.

"Now," he said, "suppose your father some morning came downstairs, and, on going to the cellar, found it flooded; what would he do first? Would he begin bailing the water out?"

"No, of course not."

"Now, what would be the first thing he'd do?"

After a short silence, a shrill, piping voice cried out: "Why, he'd carry on awful!"

SUMMERTIME IN THE COUNTRY.

By MAX ADELER.

We have moved into the country to stay for a few weeks with some of our relations. They gave us such very warm and repeated invitations that we concluded to make some sacrifice to go, to oblige them, and I had no idea how much they appreciated our company until the end of the first week, when they handed me a bill for fifty dollars for board for three of us.

Life in the country is very charming in summertime. We sleep in the spare room in the garret, where the temperature gets up to one hundred and four degrees. The roof has not been repaired since Columbus landed, and consequently it is full of apertures. For any one who wants to study astronomy while lying in bed, our garret offers phenomenal advantages; but whenever it rains at night there is nothing to be done but to make a raft out of the clothes horse and some bed slats, and float the family until daylight. It is sometimes an exciting apartment. A few nights ago, while hitting at a mosquito with a shuck pillow, I knocked a wasps' nest off of one of the rafters, and in the morning we had knobs as big as hickory nuts all over our faces and legs.

It is a good thing to live out here in the country, because the early-morning air is so healthful. We get our morning air very early. The family is routed out at four o'clock, so that the men may go to the harvest field, and if we lie abed, there will be nothing to eat until dinnertime. To be sure, that would not make any very great difference, if we could live without food, for country diet is not as attractive as I hoped it would be.

We always have salt ham and fried potatoes for breakfast; then we have boiled ham and potatoes for dinner, and cold potatoes and sliced ham for supper. On Sundays we have two kinds of ham and stewed potatoes, and potato pudding for dessert. When I asked for milk for the children, they said they were using all the milk to fatten the calves.

They apologized for not having butter because the hucksters who supplied it hadn't come. I threw out a hint about raspberries, but they said the man at the store was expecting them every day from the city, and I would have to wait. They get their potatoes from the city, too, and the ham was cured in Cincinnati.

The only vegetable that grows here is cabbage, but we are not allowed to eat it, because they trade it off at the store for potatoes, and they swap their chickens to the huckster for butter—that is, their young chickens. We had for dinner one day a hen that cackled during the War of 1812. She ate like a piece of india-rubber boot.

One of the finest things about living in the country is that you can wander off to some shady spot and lie in luxurious ease upon the grass, dreaming away the hours. And while you are dreaming away the hours, straddle bugs will probably crawl up your pantaloons and bite you, and caterpillars will insert themselves between your shirt collar and neck. When you get home you find that you have caught a frightful cold from lying on the damp grass, and while you are sneezing, you learn that one of the children has fallen out of the haymow and run a pitchfork through his calf, and that the other one has been pitched over the fence by the Durham bull.

Then, we like to sit out in the cool of the evening and enjoy the calm, quiet solitude of the place. There is a canal at the end of the lawn, and when we get enough of the quiet solitude, the *Mary Jane, of Pencader*, will come along, and we will be entertained by the captain, who swears violently at the boy because he does not stimulate the mules to sufficient activity. As he wakes the echoes with his abnormal profanity, we suddenly put the children to bed to protect them from demoralization; and then, when the hind mule has kicked at the boy three or four times, the boat passes upstream, and silence once more returns.

We sit there until bedtime, beating off the mosquitoes with one hand and scratching the bites with the other. And as soon as we get into our garret with a candle the atmosphere is filled with bugs, which dance around the room and beat against the walls until we go to sleep.

It is a good thing to live in the country, because the children have such a chance to obtain vigorous health. They begin the summer in the country with prickly heat. Before that is cured they get cholera morbus from eating green apples.

Afterward they catch mumps from the children on the next farm, and at intermediate periods they get bitten by the dog, they come near drowning in the creek, they are sunstruck, they rub against poison vine in the woods and swell up, they are tangled in the mower and lose fingers in the feed cutter, they are run over by the ox cart and ground up in the threshing machine.

Then they cry all night in our garret, and eat so much at meals that the owner of the house looks sour at them and growls out something about raising the price of board; and they wear out clothes enough to run an orphan asylum for a couple of years.

One of the best things about the country is that it gives you a chance to go a-fishing. We fish in the creek. After digging for a couple of hours in search of worms, we go to the water and throw in. I get a bite and pull up, and the line winds tightly around the limb of a tree. Then I shin up the tree and undo it, and throw in again. After several more ineffectual bites, I pull up an eel, and find that he has swallowed the hook.

Everybody knows how it is with an eel. You might as well try to hold a streak of lightning. When he has covered your boots with slime, he bites the line off and wriggles back into the water. When you have put on a new hook, you get a bite, and jerk out a muddy snag, and then you catch one small minnow and find that you have been sitting in a puddle of water, waiting for him to nibble.

As your bait is exhausted, you conclude to go home, where you can put some ointment on your blistered hands and face, and pick the ticks out of your skin and have sewed up the rents made in your trousers by the blackberry bushes, and get ready for the mosquitoes in the evening.

There are some very peculiar charms about rural life, and the farmer is the noblest man on earth. But as for me, I believe I prefer existence in an alley in the city to even temporary residence among the agricultural population.

THE NEWS OF ALL NATIONS.

Failed to Get Guinea Eggs.

Last autumn Clinton B. Struble, of Penn Yan, N. Y., bought one hundred guinea fowls of a dealer in North Carolina, with the intention of raising guineas on his Esperanza estate for the Rochester market. The flock has had the best of care and has been fed with every variety of supposedly egg-producing concoctions known to Yates County poultrymen. Notwithstanding this treatment, which has been kept up for over six months, not one egg was received.

Recently Mr. Struble took a poultry expert home with him in the hope that he might find out what the trouble has been. The expert found the flock in a splendidly healthy condition, but all male birds.

"Dead Man" High, Not Dry.

"There is a dead man on the roof of City Hall," was the telephone message to Mayor Mitchel's office, in New York City, the other afternoon. Like alarms followed from tenants of skyscrapers around City Hall Park. Peter Chieffo, the janitor, was sent aloft to investigate.

The janitor found a man stretched out asleep on the sunny side of the clock tower. There was an aroma of rum about him and a spirit of rebellion in his heart. He protested volubly at being awakened.

"'Snice'n' warm up here," he said; "lemme 'lone."

Chieffo helped him down, first by the ladder which leads from the attic to the skylight on the roof, then down two flights of spiral stairs, and lastly down the three remaining marble flights to City Hall Park. How he got up there with the bundle he was carrying is a question which puzzles the members of the board of estimate. The visitor was unable to explain or even to give his name.

Sudden Finish of a "Bad Man's" Reign.

In the early spring of 1877 the then wild-and-woolly little mining city of Joplin, Mo., began to hear rumors of a great find of shallow lead on the banks of Short Creek, just across the State line in Kansas. Short Creek is a little stream that rises in the western part of Jasper County, Missouri, and, after meandering around a few miles, empties into Spring River, in the eastern part of Cherokee County, Kansas.

The new discovery of lead was on this stream some nine miles from Joplin. At that time zinc mining was still in its infancy. In fact, there were thousands of tons of high-grade zinc ore, which, under the name of "black jack," had been thrown out from the lead, with which it mingled and lay in the old dumps of the region. But the new strike was of lead only, and shallow lead was the one thing sought after by the miners of those days.

Then there followed a "stampede" worthy to be classed with those we have read about as occurring in the gold fields. One year from that day there was on that ground a thriving little city that claimed a population of 5,000 people.

There flocked in every blackleg and professional "bad man" from a wide section of country. Gambling of all grades flourished unchecked in the broad light of day. Half the buildings were saloons, and a large share of the other half were brothels. The crooked little trail along which the buildings of the place were scattered was very appropriately dubbed "Red-hot Street" by the miners, and it played fully up to its name for many weeks.

Naturally, such surroundings and conditions bred crime. There was quarreling, fighting, and bloodshed. One or two men dropped out of sight, but their disappearance caused hardly a ripple of inquiry. They were mostly of that sort who "die with their boots on," and no one mourned their loss. Gradually the evil elements grew bolder, and under the lead of the bolder spirits among them, took advantage of the general disorder to rob and plunder at every opportunity.

At the head of these plunderers was one of those characters of whom we read in stories of wild Western life, and whose likeness we may still see exploited upon the screen of the moving pictures. He was a typical "bad man" of the Western mining country. A tall, finely formed fellow, with a handsome, dare-devil face. He wore his hair well down onto his shoulders, sported high-heeled, red-topped boots, "toted" a pair of big revolvers, and when under the influence of liquor, which was practically all the time, he was a dangerous man. The respectable element feared him and the coterie which followed his lead. But there was no organized authority to appeal to for protection, and nothing was done, while the gang went on their way unchecked and grew in insolence and outrage day by day.

This wild leader of a wild band called himself "Tiger Bill" and boasted loudly of the men he had killed in other places and as to the valiant things he proposed to do on Short Creek. But the men of the place were mostly too busy to pay any attention to the vaporings of Tiger Bill, and as time went on he waxed more truculent and boastful than ever.

But he was destined to meet disaster at the moment when his prestige was greatest, and from a source the very last that either the desperado himself or any one else would have thought capable of resistance to his will. Among the dozen or so plank sheds along Red-hot Street, that had up the name of "Restaurant," was a rough box of a place presided over by a little German.

He was a meek-looking, pink-and-white little man, with weak eyes sheltered behind a pair of large spectacles. He was an industrious fellow, who attended strictly to his business, and whose only name, so far as we knew, was Gus.

One morning Tiger Bill rose in an unusually ferocious frame of mind. The luck had been against him at cards the night before, and his morning potations had not sufficed to soothe his ruffled spirits. Walking along Red-hot Street, he spied little Gus hard at work in his shed. The sight seemed to fire Bill's soul with a desire to exploit his fame in the place. He felt assured that the inoffensive little German was a tenderfoot ready to his hand,

on whom he could demonstrate his valor and satisfy his desire for blood and fame in perfect safety to himself.

"It's a long time," he remarked to the henchman at his side; "it's a long time since I had a man for breakfast. Watch me get the little Dutchman."

So saying, he strode into the place, with his revolver held ostentatiously in his right hand. Walking up to the rough board counter, he said:

"Here, you little, sore-eyed cuss, give me half a dozen raw oysters. Do it pretty quick, too, if you know what is good for yourself."

Gus hastened to fill the order. Not a sign did he show of fear, but some remarked later that he served the oysters with his left hand.

"Here," shouted Bill. "What do you mean sticking such oysters as them under my nose?"

And at the word he dashed the contents of the dish full in the face of the German. As he did so, he threw up his hand holding the revolver. Beyond question he meant to kill Gus.

But Tiger Bill never fired that shot. Quicker than even his trained and murderous hand, quick as a flash, indeed, the little German's hand came up, and it held a big, old-fashioned Colt revolver, and in an instant the desperado was as dead as he could reasonably expect to be, with a bullet hole drilled neatly through his head.

A great crowd instantly rushed in. Bill lay dead upon the floor, his right hand still holding the revolver; behind the counter stood Gus, quietly wiping off the mess of oysters from his face and the counter.

"Good Lord, Gus, what have you done?" shouted one.

"Mine Gott," replied Gus. "Vat must I do? He vas schlapped me mit der oysters of der face already, und he vas his gun have ready to shoot. Next time maybe he takes a tenderfoot, maybe! Eh?"

There was nothing further to be said. Gus had stated the question perfectly. So they picked up what was left of Tiger Bill, and, clad as he was, and "with his boots on," they thrust him into a hole in the woods. Then the decent element, always in a large majority, rallied, and elected men to serve as a committee to control the town until such time as a regular government could be established.

One of the first duties that committee discharged was to send forth notice that if any of the Tiger Bill crowd or their sympathizers were caught in Short Creek that night there would be one of the largest and liveliest hangings in history. That notice was enough; without Tiger Bill, the courage of the bunch was wholly a minus quantity, and they stayed not upon the order of their going, but went.

Silent Workers of the "Black Cabinet."

"Headwork and legwork are more important than green goggles and false whiskers" for the modern sleuth, according to William J. Flynn, chief of the United States Secret Service, better known as Uncle Sam's "Black Cabinet."

As a rule, disguises are not used by those in the service. If the matter in hand, for instance, requires the collection of information from workmen, a man is chosen who looks the part without a disguise. He simply wears such clothes as workmen wear and affects the manners and speech of the men with whom he mingles. On the other hand, if the work requires contact with people in a better-dressed walk of life, or with foreigners or negroes, an operative of the same class is chosen.

The United States Secret Service is under the direct supervision of the secretary of the treasury. The only thing that can land a man in its employ is passing the preliminary examination, submitting to a personal interview with Chief Flynn, and showing one's nerve and ability during a month of testing out in the real business of detective work for Uncle Sam. If a man makes good after this preliminary test, he goes on the roll permanently.

The men are gathered from greatly different sources. There are college graduates, mostly sons of criminal lawyers; musicians, stenographers, linguists, bank clerks, identification experts, telegraph operators, commissioned and noncommissioned officers of the army or navy, newspaper men, a couple of sheriffs, one or two wardens, and an ex-mayor.

Some of the best work of secret-service operatives in recent years has been accomplished by men formerly in the claims department of a railroad or life-insurance companies.

The secret-service headquarters in Washington occupies a very unpretentious suite of offices on the first floor of the treasury department. Here are the private offices of Chief Flynn, whose salary is $4,000 a year, and the assistant chief, William Moran, regarded as the greatest expert in the detection of counterfeits and counterfeiters.

There is a clerical division employing not more than a dozen persons; an identification bureau, where are kept on file the records of all known counterfeiters and other undesirable citizens, and a large storeroom, where confiscated counterfeiting outfits seized in raids are allowed to accumulate pending their destruction according to law. There is a saying in the service that "once a counterfeiter always a counterfeiter."

The secret service was created primarily to catch counterfeiters and protect the person of the president. In 1861 there was carried in one of the appropriation acts $10,000 for suppressing the counterfeiting of coin. Annually thereafter provision was made for the same purpose, and embracing the counterfeiting of paper currency.

The United States is divided into secret-service districts, each district having headquarters conveniently located in charge of a skilled operative, who has under his direction from time to time as many assistants as the criminal activities in his locality demand.

Perhaps the most picturesque work of the secret service is performed by its "flying squadron"—the free-lance field workers, who may be sent to any place at any time. Most of these men are not much above thirty years of age; the average age of all secret-service men is under thirty-five. They are alert, energetic, resourceful, and capable of assuming almost any part of a sleuth demanded.

A new recruit in the service starts in as an assistant operative at three dollars a day—if he proves worthy, he is promoted to the rank of operative at five dollars a day. As an operative his pay may increase to seven dollars a day, but before he can obtain the top-notch salary, he must have made good and have acquired a considerable fund of practical experience valuable to the service.

One of the most mysterious phases of the secret-service work concerns the maintenance of communication between the central office in Washington and its field opera-

tives. A message, even in cipher is never dispatched openly to his chief, but to some private individual, previously agreed upon, who in turn places the message in the hands of Chief Flynn.

Secret-service men are at work all the time. When there is no particular case on hand, they are getting a line on the habits, haunts, and byways of certain people who seem to be living without apparent effort. The shadowed party does not suspect it, and he may never know.

Some years ago there was a notorious counterfeiter named Emanuel Ninger, who for seventeen years kept the secret-service men of the whole country chasing him. When they finally landed him, they had enough evidence against him to convict him on a dozen counts.

Ninger was a manufacturer of hand-painted paper money. Being a skillful artist, he was able to paint on white paper an all-but-perfect reproduction of a ten or twenty-dollar bill. But the wet finger of a bartender coming in contact with one of Ninger's hand-painted bills caused the color to "run." Ninger had passed this particular bill himself, and through it he was traced, arrested, and convicted.

At the time of his arrest the Washington bureau had on hand a large collection of "Ninger notes," but Ninger, until apprehended, had been unknown to the secret service, and the notes were credited to "Jim the Penman."

An Indiana preacher, William K. Wade, turned counterfeiter, but confined himself to twenty-five-cent pieces. The secret-service men were never able to discover the location of his factory nor find his apparatus, but the evidence against him was conclusive, and he was convicted. He served his term in the penitentiary.

During the fiscal year ended June 30th last, there were 368 arrests by the secret service, with seizure of $44,412 of counterfeit and altered notes, $22,319 of counterfeit coins, 154 plates, four dies, and 162 molds.

This Goose Lays Big Eggs.

George Motter, of Nova, Ohio, reports that he has a remarkable goose. This goose doesn't lay golden eggs, but it does lay eggs which are five inches long, two and seven-eighths inches in diameter, and which weigh three-quarters of a pound each. And Mr. Motter's goose continues to lay in spite of the fact that she has passed her thirteenth birthday.

"Rings in Noses and Bells on Their Toes."

Fashions of men and women frequently jump from one extreme to another, but, according to a general all-around prophet, America is soon to witness a series of transformations that will make plain, old-fashioned people simply gasp with amazement. Society maids are to wear rings in their noses and bells on their toes; the fair sex will become entirely bald, and perhaps have cute little landscape scenes done in oil here and there on their shining pates; men may adopt skirts, wear bracelets and earrings, and possibly carry fans instead of canes, the walking sticks being permissible to women alone.

This old world is fast approaching its great upheaval stage, this wonderful prognosticator tells us. The great war of nations shows it—the Scriptures show it, he declares. We have been in preparation for this upheaval for nearly eighty years. He gets this from Peter's saying that an hour of God's time is a thousand years. An hour of our time would be eighty-three and one-third years of the Lord's. This is our eleventh hour of dispensation. It began in 1829 or thereabouts. He also figures it out that the European war will end one year, one month, one day, and one hour from the date of its inception—that—that—oh, well, that lots of things are about to happen, including the customary rise in beef prices.

James Henry Tate is fifty years old, is a pleasant little man, with a great deal of personality and knowledge of events, past, present, and—possibly—the future. Born in America of wealthy parents, educated in the East, and possessing the "gift of tongues" and the power of healing, he went to Denver five years ago after a revelation that Denver is to be the central city of the great upheaval, religious and otherwise.

"Present-day fashions are bearing out the Scriptures. In a very few years women will be wearing bells on their shoes," he predicts. "Skirts will become tighter, and women will become old at early ages. Then women will wear rings in their noses and will become bald, totally bald. For the Scriptures read in the third chapter of Isaiah, 16th, 17th, and 18th verses:

"'Moreover, the Lord said because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go and making a tinkling with their feet, therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the heads of the daughters of Zion.'

"I was called by the spirit when I was but seven years old. I have received many calls since. I have the power of healing by the laying on of hands. I carry a bottle of olive oil with me with which I anoint any one who wishes to be healed, after the devils are cast out of the body. I have a good constitution and have never had a doctor.

"My father is eighty-five years old, has served as a State senator in Wisconsin, and he is rugged and strong. I eat no pork or fish that do not have scales. I bar catfish, for catfish are scavengers and unclean. I eat coarse bread and drink pure water.

"Latter-day churches are ignorant in their evils, and that is what is causing so much backsliding. I have telegraphed President Wilson and Secretary of State Bryan many times, and they have always followed my advice, especially in the maintaining of strict neutrality. I have received personal notes from our president, thanking me for my advice and prayers."

Interesting New Inventions.

J. B. Deidrich, of Streator, Ill., has invented a bread slicer which he believes will be especially valuable for restaurants and boarding houses. The knife is not much different from the ordinary bread knife, but it is suspended from a frame which causes it to come down in the same place each time it is swung for a cut. There is also a gauge which insures every slice being of the same thickness. With its use there is no danger of bread more than an eighth of an inch thick getting by the censor.

Two Wisconsin inventors have patented a kerosene lamp that is automatically extinguished if upset or even lifted from a support.

A screen has been patented that is raised and low-

ered with a window so as not to interfere with the light when the window is shut.

The latest aëroplane invention is the use of a recording phonograph by which the operator may make notes of his observations.

A conveyer belt has been recently made for an Ohio stone quarry which cost $6,000, weighs 12,000 pounds, is 839 feet long, and 26 inches in width—one of the largest ever made, if not the record breaker itself.

For carrying baskets that lack handles of their own, a folding wire handle has been invented.

A cane that can be taken apart and converted into a stool is a French invention.

Odd Texas Chicken Prodigy.

A four-legged chicken is the latest poultry prodigy to appear in Sulphur Springs, Texas. Mrs. Neal Stribbling found this odd chicken in a brood of twelve Rhode Island Reds. The baby chicken has two legs on its back, directly above its two lower legs. It seems to be able to get about quite as easily as the others of the hatch.

While sitting down it looks as if it were lying on its back, especially when it stretches its upper legs, but generally they lie flat. When walking the upper legs keep in motion, as if they helped the little chick to get over the ground. It is now five days old, seems healthy, and there is every indication that it will live.

Mrs. Stribbling thinks that possibly, later on, the chicken will be able to flop over and use its upper legs for walking. Should this prove true, she will try to sell it to a circus.

Egg in Contribution Plate.

When Reverend J. George Betzle, pastor of the First Baptist Church, in Fremont, Neb., entered the church on a mission, he was surprised to see a hen flutter out from under the pulpit. In his chase after the startled biddy Mr. Betzle found an egg in the collection plate. The hen entered the church through an open window and evidently wanted to contribute her mite to the cause by laying an egg.

Stayed in One Room Thirty-seven Years.

After spending thirty-seven years in solitary confinement in a dungeonlike room that knew no ray of sunshine, Monroe Eoff, sixty-eight years old, Confederate veteran, died in Union, Ark. Thirty-seven years ago he became blind, and immediately shut himself in his room, from which he never left alive. His wife and daughter were the only persons permitted to enter the room.

Gopher-trail Swindle Mulcts the Country.

Following the discovery that Teodoro Rosas, a Mexican youth, of Phoenix, Ariz., had been conducting a gopher farm and mulcting the county out of fifty to one hundred dollars a month, the supervisors abolished the bounty of five cents which they had long paid on each gopher tail.

Farmers regard gophers as pests, and at their request the bounty was made. Bounty claimants were required only to present the tails of rodents, it being presumed that the animals the tails had belonged to were killed. Young Rosas presented several hundred tails a month.

One of the supervisors chanced to pass by the Rosas farm and saw that it was honeycombed with gophers' burrows. He saw a number of gophers without tails, and questioned Rosas, who admitted that he had never killed a gopher, but, after removing their tails, turned them loose for breeding purposes.

Centipedes Moving North.

The department of agriculture has made a study of the house centipede which of late has spread from the Southern States to a number of Northern States, and has issued a bulletin in which some of its characteristics are set forth. It thrives in most places and devours various house pests, such as moths, roaches, flies, probably even bedbugs, and others. It does not injure household goods, woolens, et cetera, as is commonly supposed. Its bite is somewhat poisonous, but it seldom bites human beings except in self-defense. Prompt dressing with ammonia is recommended as the best remedy for the bites.

Biggest Lemon Is in Jersey.

Mrs. Henry H. Bull, of Sparta, N. J., is exhibiting a lemon said to be the largest ever raised in a hothouse in this section of the country. The lemon measures thirteen inches in circumference, is eight inches in length, and weighs four pounds. It took one year from the time the tree blossomed until the lemon was ripe. The trees is five years old.

Fat Girl Passenger Stops Railway Traffic.

Traffic on the New York Central line was delayed twenty minutes when Anna Chelton, Oil City's fat girl, weighing more than 700 pounds, departed to join a circus.

Half a dozen men transported her in a specially made wheel chair to the baggage car, and when a transfer was made at Andover, Pa., the car was detached and shifted to the freight depot. Later the baggage car of the second train was shifted to the depot, and the weighty damsel placed in it. The train was held until the crew made the transfer.

Carnegie Medal Is Well Won by Boy.

The stuff they mold heroes of cropped out at Dothan, Ala., one spring morning. Now Henry T. Matthews, a youngster of that city, is wearing a bronze medal presented by Andrew Carnegie for a remarkable deed of valor committed with such modesty as would almost suggest indifference. Newspapers throughout the State are now presenting the youth's name as a new representative of Alabama in the select few the Carnegie commission chooses to call heroes. It all came about something like this:

Little Benjamin Grant, son of B. J. Grant, Dothan banker, and several other playmates, whose ages averaged about the three-year mark, had slipped from their nurses who chatted in the sunshine and were enjoying the fine spring morning away up under the Grant residence, digging trenches, making frog houses, tunnels, and such things and getting their fresh linen just as dirty as they shouldn't. Suddenly Benjamin disappeared, right before the eyes of his mystified young friends. It was as if the earth had swallowed him up.

The fair-haired tot had slipped into a deserted bored well, hid up under the house for so long that no one ever remembered when it had been dug, when it had been used, or when it had been deserted and covered

up by the building. Moreover, no one happened to know how deep it was, as was later learned, and with these thoughts rushing through her frightened brain the nurse girl in charge of little Ben prepared to inform the child's mother that her son was somewhere below earth, in a darkened, unknown hole.

The alarm spread with a swiftness hardly believable. Within a few minutes every woman in the neighborhood and every man who might be located sitting about home during the busy part of the morning had rushed to the scene.

The hole into which the boy had fallen was not large enough to carry light more than a few feet; no man in a thousand could squeeze his shoulders into the opening. To be exact, it measured thirteen inches in diameter, as a later measurement showed.

Several men gazed into the blackness of the hole and gazed back again, their faces pale, their eyes wide with a helplessness that brought on an uncanny fright, even in the hearts of the strongest.

Some suggested a rope, others thought of hooks, and some said dig a tunnel. All soon agreed, however, that none of the plans of rescue could be carried out, for a three-year-old boy would never be expected to grab a rope to be pulled through yards and yards of a bored well; iron hooks might tear the baby to pieces while rescuers knelt and heard his cries in vain, and a tunnel to the distance where his cries indicated he had fallen would certainly mean a fatal cave-in.

Suggestions that some person be lowered had, of course, been advanced long before, but had proven useless, for not one person in the great crowd could enter the small opening.

"Send out and get some boys," shouted one of the directors of the work. The schools and their numerous offerings of all sizes and ages of lads came first into the minds of the volunteer hunters. Two automobiles rushed to a school less than three blocks away.

"We want the nerviest, bravest kids you've got in the building," said a member of the party to the superintendent. "Give us some small ones, who are not afraid."

The boys arrived. One by one they crept under the house; one by one they looked into the blackness of the hole, and one by one they drew back again. Their eyes glared and they soon became members of the back row of spectators.

Then Henry Matthews came up. He rode into the edge of the crowd on his bicycle, upon which he carried clothes for a tailor, to support his widowed mother.

"What's the matter?" he inquired meekly. Some one broke the uncanny quietness for a moment and told him.

"Here's another kid; try him," whispered a man to the would-be rescuers who had grown despondent. Henry walked forward. They told him what it meant to go headfirst for perhaps twenty or thirty feet downward.

"Let me down," said the frail boy quietly.

His feet were securely tied with a heavy rope. An electric light with an extension cord was placed in his hand. The boy gazed slowly about the peering faces and shoved his pale face into the blackness. Down he went, inch by inch, and then foot by foot. The rope disappeared behind him for one yard, two yards, then three, four, five, and six yards. He was still going down, and the light had disappeared in the blackness. The rope must have gone forty feet, thought the men at the other end of the line. Then:

"Pull," came the faint command from down in the ground. The men at the other end smiled with eagerness as they carefully drew on the line. Then they looked at each other in excited expectation, for the load on the rope was heavier than when Harry descended.

Ten feet of the rope had been pulled to the surface, when the men's faces changed. Their eyes again filled with fright. Quickly they drew on the line, and soon Henry, his body covered with mud, sticks, and rubbish, appeared alone. They gave him water, fanned him for a second, and his pale face began to show faint color again. Then he spoke.

"I pulled him about ten feet," he panted, "but his hands—his hands—were so slick—the mud came off and he dropped back. He was on some sticks—sticks caught in the well—when I found him—I'm afraid he fell back through them. If he did, we can't get him."

Bennie's mother fainted and was carried away. Other women screamed and rushed about blindly. Bennie's voice was getting fainter. Old men cried—men whose hearts had faced everything from the trials of the Civil War to modern troubles.

"Let me down again," said the brave young rescuer, as he rubbed his face, as if to awaken to his undertaking.

Again his face disappeared, then his body, and then his feet. On and on he went down. Thirty-five feet of the grass rope had disappeared when the order to "pull" was heard far off. Anxiously, and with less hope than before, the men pulled. The line was heavier as they pulled, foot after foot, above the surface.

The crying of a baby was heard down in the ground. The larger boy's feet appeared at the top; then his body, and then his face.

Then—little Bennie, clasped by each wrist by a pair of muddy hands, appeared on earth again.

The women screamed and cried for the hundredth time that morning. The men, or, rather, most of them, wept and then cheered. Now everybody cheered; and hundreds of voices let everybody within a block know that the romper-clad boy was in his mother's arms. They also let those about know that Henry had emerged from beneath the house with eyes, hair, hands, and clothing covered with mud. They grabbed him; women kissed him, and men crowded about the boy.

"Haven't got time to stop now," said Henry. "Got to get back to the shop." And he hurriedly washed the dirt from his face. But they wouldn't let him go. They surged about the wondering lad and held him for a while, or at least until the praising crowds could press fifty dollars into his bread-earning little hands. Then he turned, jumped upon his bicycle, and rode speedily away, to deliver the clothes for the tailor, for the support of himself and his widowed mother.

Two Years on Their Honeymoon Walk.

Journeys across the continent twice on foot within a period of two years marked the unique honeymoon trip taken by Mr. and Mrs. John Broxman, of near Harris-

burg, Pa., who arrived in Baltimore, Md., a few days ago, and who, for just two hours, were the guests of Mrs. C. C. Webber, wife of the pastor of the Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Greene Street, near Lombard.

In the twenty-four months that they have been away the young married couple have traversed the parched sands of the semitropical countries of the South, the fertile valleys of the Middle West, and the rugged mountain paths of the Far Western States. They are happy, and have returned to their homes without reporting a mishap.

In making their long journey on foot, Mr. and Mrs. Broxman have won both fame and fortune, for not only were they cordially welcomed in all the towns and cities through which they passed, but as the result of their long hike they have been presented with a huge sum of money by a brother-in-law of Mrs. Broxman in California, and henceforth they will make their home on a farm which has been purchased by the bridegroom near Harrisburg.

Mr. and Mrs. Broxman strolled into Baltimore unnoticed, and sought acquaintances whom they had known years ago. In their search for their friends they drifted into the neighborhood of Greene and Lombard Streets and dropped into the parsonage of the Emmanuel Evangelical Church in order to get directions as to streets and house numbers. Mrs. Webber happened to be at home, and invited the strangers in. She could not aid them in their quest for the Baltimore friends, but she did entertain them the greater part of the afternoon, and while enjoying the hospitality of her home, the young people told of their unique honeymoon trip.

Mr. and Mrs. Broxman were married two years ago, and had planned to spend their honeymoon quietly in the East. But Mrs. Broxman's brother-in-law in Santa Ana, Cal., told them that he would present them with a substantial sum of money if they would take as their honeymoon trip a "stroll" from Harrisburg to California and back again. They decided to try and win the prize held out to them, so immediately after the wedding ceremony was performed, they started on their long hike.

From Baltimore the young couple went to Harrisburg.

Dogs Have Aquired the Art of Speech.

In a previous issue we briefly described a dog named Woodrow Wilson that was said to be able to utter sounds which distinctly resemble words. The dog is a bull terrier and was named Woodrow Wilson because on the day of President Wilson's inauguration he wandered into the home of Miss Rose Bohn, of Scottsdale, Pa., his present owner.

He does such feats in "talking" that he is the wonder of the town. He answers questions promptly and correctly. For instance, when he is asked "Whom do you love?" he promptly replies, "My mamma."

Woodrow Wilson may be a remarkable dog, but there have been other talking dogs brought to the attention of the public during the last decade, says a writer who has made note of them. There was Cutey! Did you ever hear of her? Well, her owner was positive she could speak, and many of his friends were willing to corroborate his enthusiastic statements.

Cutey's ability as a talking dog was brought to the attention of the public in a peculiar way. A small boy was playing with a ball in East Fourteenth Street, New York, one afternoon when a fox terrier strolled along and stopped to watch the boy. Greatly to the boy's astonishment the dog suddenly said: "I want my rights."

It did not take long for the boy to spread the news about the talking dog, and finally it reached the newspapers. A reporter was sent to see the owner of the dog, Fred Jackson, of 241 East Fourteenth Street. Although the reporter was skeptical when he entered Cutey's home, he emerged convinced that if the dog did not speak, she made a pretty good attempt.

It took Cutey's owner three months to teach her how to say "I want my rights." He got the idea from observing the dog trying to repeat things that were said to her. It was also asserted by neighbors that Cutey was able to say "I will not" and "Good night, everybody."

A dog named Rolf attracted much attention in Berlin because of his power to utter sounds which could be distinguished as words. This dog not only could speak, but he could spell. In fact, he attracted so much attention that Professor Claparede, of the department of experimental pyschology of the University of Geneva examined the dog and pronounced him a wonder.

The professor, in order to avoid collusion between the dog and his mistress, brought a set of pictures along with him which the dog had never seen. One of the pictures showed four mice nibbling at cheese. Without any hesitation the dog spelled out words which convinced Professor Claparede that Rolf knew what the picture was.

Not long ago the police of Philadelphia made what they considered an important capture in the form of a dog who was in league with a band of thieves. While this animal did some petty thieving on his own account, he was valuable to the thieves because of his ability to "talk" to them whenever he saw policemen approaching. His "talk" consisted of short barks, which the thieves understood perfectly.

Although the police were suspicious of the owners of the dog, they could never catch them in the act. Finally it dawned on them that the dog had been trained to run up and down before places which were being robbed. The police then decided to watch the dog, and, swooping down suddenly one night on the four-footed "lookout," they caught the thieves at work.

There lived in Cranford, N. J., a dog which could not only "talk" but read a newspaper as well. The dog, whose name was Throgs, was the property of Miss Alice Lakey, of the New Jersey State Food Commission, and had the regular job of going to the newspaper store every morning for the family paper. He carried the coin wrapped up in a paper, gave it to the news dealer, got his paper, and returned home with it in his mouth.

One morning the regular news dealer was not present at the stand, but another person in the store slipped a paper into Throgs' mouth. The dog walked slowly out of the store to the other side of the street, where he dropped the paper and then thoroughly scrutinized it. Convinced that it was not the paper he was in the habit of getting, he sat down and waited until the news dealer returned. Then he walked back to the store, got his regular paper, and trotted home with it.

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